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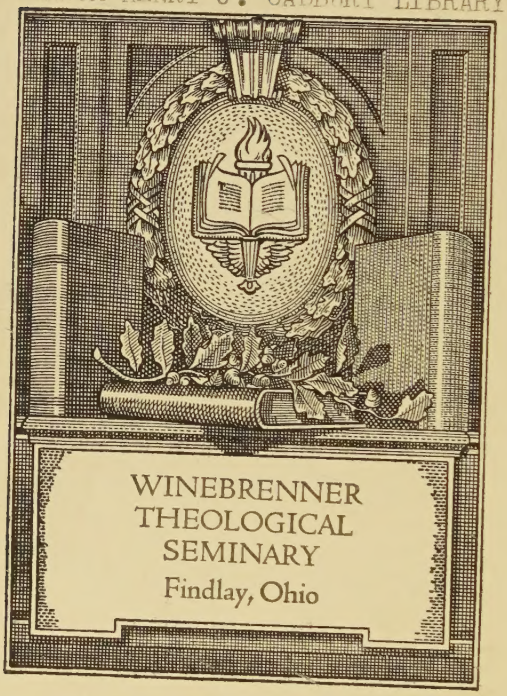

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THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

ITS DOCTRINE AND SIGNIFICANCE

BY

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"THE KINGDOM AND THE MESSIAH" ETC.

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PREFACE.

It is only of late years that anything like an adequate study has been bestowed on the Epistle to the Hebrews. A few great passages of the Epistle have always been among the most familiar in scripture, but even professed theologians have concerned themselves little with its teaching as a whole. This neglect has been partly due to the character of the argument, which is cast in an archaic mould, and often impresses a modern reader as barren and artificial. To a still greater extent the Epistle has suffered from the mistaken views that have prevailed as to its nature and purpose. It has been commonly regarded as a mere appendix to the Pauline writings, or as a tract that has survived from a forgotten controversy, or at best as the manifesto of some isolated sect. A work that appeared to count for so little in the main development of Christian thought has not unnaturally been pushed into the background.

Within the last generation much has been done, and especially by English writers, to atone for past neglect of the Epistle. Not to mention a number of excellent commentaries, its teaching has been interpreted by such

distinguished scholars as Dr. A. B. Bruce and Dr. G. Milligan, and more recently in a beautiful and suggestive book, *The Epistle of Priesthood*, by Dr. A. Nairne. Another work on the same subject may be reckoned superfluous, but it appears to me that the writers just named, while they have illuminated many dark places in the Epistle, have been warped in their approach to it by the old prepossessions, and have thereby overlooked some of its essential aspects.

No excuse, however, is needed for making a new attempt to expound this noble New Testament writing. For many reasons, as I have tried to show in the concluding chapter, the Epistle to Hebrews, for all its air of antiquity, makes a peculiar appeal to the mind of our own age. It deals with questions which are ultimately the same as those which are now perplexing us, and suggests answers to them which are still valid. This has been felt by many, in all the Christian churches, who vaguely perceive the drift of the argument but cannot follow it in detail. I have tried in the present book to examine this difficult Epistle from several new points of view, and to throw some clearer light on its underlying ideas.

E. F. SCOTT.

New York,
June 1922.

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THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

CHAPTER I.

THE LITERARY PROBLEMS.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is in many respects the riddle of the New Testament. Nothing is known of its origin; no agreement has yet been reached as to its literary character and theological affinities; the more it is studied in detail the more it abounds in problems —historical, doctrinal, exegetical—which seem to defy solution. Among early Christian writings it stands solitary and mysterious, "without father, without mother, without genealogy," like that Melchizedek on whom its argument turns.

Almost from the beginning the church was aware of something strange and perplexing about this Epistle. As one of the most ancient and valuable of Christian books it had a paramount claim to a place in the New Testament, but this place was not fully conceded to it for several centuries. The earliest critics, like their modern successors, were puzzled by it, and were un-

willing to commit themselves to a judgment. It had come down without the credentials of Apostolic authorship ; it could not be classified under any of the acknowledged types of primitive literature. At last it was grudgingly admitted to the Canon, but only through the pious fiction, never really accepted until the Middle Ages, that it was an anonymous Epistle of Paul. But the doubt which hung so long over the canonicity of Hebrews need cause us no misgivings. It serves to remind us, rather, that the Epistle won its way into the New Testament by its intrinsic excellence, in spite of all conventional scruples. Without any formal passport it had approved itself in the experience of the church as one of the primary Christian writings, worthy to rank with the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul.

If it lacked the Epistle to the Hebrews our New Testament would indeed be incalculably poorer. Notwithstanding its many obscurities it remains one of the noblest examples of Christian eloquence. There are not a few aspects of the Christian teaching, and these among the most vital, which have never been set forth so clearly and magnificently as in this Epistle. And from the historical, hardly less than from the purely religious point of view, it is one of the most valuable documents we possess. The very fact that it stands alone, with little apparent relation to the more familiar types of New Testament thought, makes its significance all the greater. By means of it we may hope to determine, in some measure, those hidden factors in primitive

Christianity which helped to bring about the later development. It is not rash to prophesy that New Testament criticism in the course of the next generation will occupy itself more and more with the Epistle to the Hebrews. Here, if anywhere, the key must be sought to some of the most difficult problems of early Christian history.

The present discussion will be mainly concerned with the teaching of the Epistle, and it is not necessary for our purpose to examine in detail the intricate literary questions which lie at the threshold. One cannot but feel, indeed, that students of the book have too often lost themselves in the mazes of its enigma, and have altogether neglected its essential message. The literature of the Epistle is overloaded with disquisitions on its authorship, date, destination, sources; and we are left with the impression that the work itself is only so much material for forming a judgment on those vexed problems. The investigation of them must certainly prepare the way for any intelligent study of its teaching, but they are at best subsidiary. It will be enough to indicate briefly the most probable results of the modern critical inquiry, before proceeding, in the light of them, to discuss the larger issues.

The first thing necessary, in the study of any ancient document, is to fix the date of its origin; and this can be done, in the case of Hebrews, within a fairly definite period, though not with absolute precision. It is quoted

by Clement of Rome in the year 95 or 96, and must by that time have existed long enough to secure some weight and authority. We are safe to assume that it was not written much later than the year 85. On the other hand, we are precluded, by clear references in the Epistle itself, as well as by the prevailing character of its thought, from assigning it to a much earlier date. The author classes himself with those who have received the gospel not from the Lord himself but from his Apostles—declaring, in so many words, that he belongs to the second Christian generation.[1] He exhorts his readers more than once to live worthily of their past, and reminds them of teachers who have laboured among them in bygone days.[2] It has sometimes been argued that an Epistle so full of ritual allusions must have been written before the destruction of the Temple in the year 70; and a confirmation of this theory has been sought in the emphatic references to the "forty years" which God's ancient people had spent in the wilderness.[3] Here, it is suggested, the writer is thinking of some primitive belief that the earthly career of the church was to be limited to a similar period, which was now on the point of expiry. This interpretation, however, is fanciful; and nothing can be inferred as to the date of the Epistle from the ritual allusions, which are not concerned with the worship of the Temple, but with that of the ancient Tabernacle. In view of the explicit statements that the church can now look back on a

[1] He 2^{3}. [2] 5^{12} 6^{9} 10^{32} 13^{7}. [3] $3^{9.\ 17}$.

past, apparently of some duration, we cannot assign the Epistle to the period anterior to the year 70. It was written, we may conclude, at some time between 70 and 85, and perhaps nearer to the later date.

Who was its author? This has always been one of the thorny questions of New Testament criticism, and almost every prominent figure of first century history has been put forward as a possible claimant. Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Luke, Clement, Aquila and Priscilla—these are only a few of the names that have found their advocates from time to time. That Paul was not the author may be regarded as certain. The one conceivable evidence in his favour is the incidental reference to "our brother Timothy," [1] and it proves nothing, since Timothy must have included most of the contemporary teachers in his circle of friends. The reference, moreover, belongs to a date when Timothy had undergone imprisonment, and of this episode in his career we have no trace during Paul's lifetime. Against the one passage which might suggest Pauline authorship may be set another, which is of itself sufficient to exclude it—the passage already mentioned in which the writer declares himself a Christian of the second generation, indebted for his knowledge of the gospel to the teaching of others. Such an admission would have been utterly impossible for Paul, who rested his whole title to Apostleship on the ground that he had received the gospel not

[1] He 13^{23}.

from men, but by direct revelation of Christ. But it is unnecessary to argue from particular passages. In its whole manner of composition—polished, deliberate, academical—the Epistle has nothing in common with the abrupt and intensely personal style of Paul. In its thought, as we shall see repeatedly, it is still more remote from him. His great fundamental doctrines are entirely absent, and even where his ideas seem to reappear they are invested with a wholly different meaning. If internal evidence means anything, the case against the Pauline authorship of Hebrews is beyond dispute. As for the other theories we can form no such definite judgment, since we have to deal for the most part with mere historical names. Luke may be set aside, for we know his mind sufficiently to be fairly certain that the theological conceptions of the Epistle were foreign to him. His interest in the gospel was not theological, but social, ethical, directly religious. To the ritual side of worship he was indifferent, or rather saw in Christianity a new type of faith in which ritual had ceased to have any place or value. The claim of Barnabas is more serious, resting as it does on a tradition which is at least as old as Tertullian. It finds support, too, from superficial resemblances to Hebrews in the extant Epistle ascribed to Barnabas, indicating that a certain mode of thought had early come to be associated with his name. But perhaps the whole tradition had its origin in the known fact that he was a Levite, and for this reason had presumably a leaning

towards speculations of a ritual nature. That Barnabas was the author of our Epistle is hardly probable, for in that case it would have carried an apostolic authority equal to that of Paul, and the long hesitation about accepting it would be inexplicable. Barnabas, too, who was a colleague of the primitive Apostles in the days before Paul's conversion, would not have ranked himself with the Christians of the second generation, who only knew the gospel from the reports of others. More can be said, at least on grounds of internal evidence, for the theory, popular since the days of Luther, that Apollos was the author of the Epistle. Apollos, as we know from the Book of Acts, was a man of Alexandria, eloquent, mighty in the scripture; and the Epistle is certainly the work of an eloquent student of the Old Testament, steeped in Alexandrian ideas. Paul's allusions to the teaching of Apollos at Corinth may be held to bear out the view that he gave a philosophical turn to Christian doctrine, such as we find in Hebrews. But the conjecture that Apollos wrote our Epistle, however felicitous, remains at best a conjecture. As the first century wore to a close, the church drew to itself not a few men of the type of Apollos, men of literary and philosophical culture, who sought the key to Christian doctrine in the symbolism of the Old Testament. In the character of the Epistle there is nothing to warrant us in assigning it to one representative of this group of teachers rather than another. It is not necessary to review all the other names that have

been suggested. Against all of them it can be urged that they are supported by no positive evidence, or by evidence that is purely fanciful or accidental. All of them, too, may be ruled out by the general consideration that if the Epistle was the work of one of the prominent figures of the Apostolic Age some reminiscence of this would have lingered in the tradition. With regard to the problem before us, as to so many other problems of the New Testament, we are compelled to admit that our knowledge of the early history, and especially of the period which immediately succeeded the death of Paul, is fragmentary. The church had many leaders and teachers, and among them men of conspicuous gifts, of whom no record has come to us. The writer of Hebrews, it is fairly certain, was one of those forgotten teachers, and the search for his name is labour wasted.

A peculiar difficulty arises in connection with the literary character of the work. It stands in our New Testament among the Epistles, and in the final chapter we have a series of requests and greetings in the regular epistolary form. Yet there is no opening address or salutation, and we should never guess, until we reach that concluding passage, that we have been reading a letter. On the other hand, we find all the marks of a spoken discourse. The style is balanced and rhetorical, with here and there a splendid outburst of eloquence. The theme is carefully planned out, and is developed

with skilful pauses and transitions and variations—all the devices of which a practised speaker avails himself in order to carry an audience with him through the windings of a complicated argument. More than once the author himself seems to indicate that he is in the act of *speaking*.[1] It has therefore been conjectured that the work is really a discourse or homily, furnished with a few extra sentences of a personal nature, and so dispatched in the form of a letter. But this theory will scarcely account for all the facts. Why, for example, were not some additions made at the beginning as well as at the end? What of the exhortations and rebukes which are always recurring? They were meant, presumably, for the audience which the speaker was addressing, and could not have been transferred, just as they were, to some quite different audience. They might, to be sure, have been inserted when the speech was revised for its second errand, but they are so woven into the argument that they must have been integral to it from the first. No attempt to determine the character of the writing has been altogether satisfactory. Perhaps we might best explain it as the work of an eloquent teacher who was separated from his church and wrote a discourse for some one else to deliver in his name. To a vicarious address of this kind he might naturally append a few words of personal remembrance and greeting. The work would thus come to bear its twofold character of speech and Epistle.

[1] He 2^{5} 6^{9} 11^{32}.

That the author addressed a definite group of readers or hearers is indubitable. Again and again he touches on particular circumstances which give weight to his admonitions, and the whole tenor of his argument, as we shall see, presupposes an audience of a quite peculiar kind. In what place are we to discover this audience? Here again we are left to conjecture, and Jerusalem, Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and other less prominent churches have all been suggested, on more or less plausible grounds. The closing salutation, "they of Italy greet you," is ambiguous, and may possibly mean that the author is in Rome, and sends remembrances from the Roman church. But it may equally imply that Italian Christians at a distance wish to be remembered to their friends at Rome, and this reading of the words appears to be borne out by several allusions in the body of the Epistle. The writer addresses a church which has been long established and has had an honourable history. Eminent teachers have laboured in it and have shown a noble example. It has distinguished itself by its liberality—a virtue for which the Roman church was always conspicuous. It has been exposed, in a special degree, to persecution. Here, it is true, we encounter the gravest argument against the Roman hypothesis, for the persecutions which have been endured are described as comparatively light. "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood." "Ye suffered reproaches, and took cheerfully the spoiling of your goods." A church that had undergone the terrible

massacre under Nero had surely displayed a constancy to which language like this is quite inadequate. But it must be borne in mind that the Epistle is addressed to the existing community, which had not yet been put to a heroic test. Not improbably the great persecution is in the writer's thought when he eulogises the bygone teachers and bids his readers follow them, "contemplating the issue of their life." [1]

Apart from these allusions which point to a Roman destination we have other evidences, tending to the same result. The Epistle is quoted by Clement not many years after it was written, and from this it may be inferred that the Roman church was well acquainted with it, before it came into general circulation. Again, the Epistle reflects a mode of thought which differs widely from that of Paul, although affected in no less a degree by Hellenistic influences. If we regard it as a product of Roman Christianity this divergence from Paulinism is capable of a natural explanation. The Roman church had grown up independently of Paul, and while faced with his problem of adapting the gospel to Gentile conditions had solved it in a fashion of its own. There were doubtless other Gentile churches which lay outside the Pauline orbit, but Rome is the only one that is positively known to us, and the peculiar theology of Hebrews may well have originated in this great independent church. Once more, the teaching of the Epistle, in not a few of its broad features, bears

[1] He 13^{7}.

the characteristic marks of Rome. Here, to a greater extent than in any other New Testament book, we meet with the principle of authority, which associated itself with the Roman church from the beginning. The writer takes his stand on the authority of Scripture, on the authority of the received "confession" and of the teachers of past days. For him the fundamental truths, which Paul is always striving to test and explain, are "the rudiments of the doctrine of Christ"—the premises which must be taken for granted before we can begin the quest for higher knowledge. In some of its aspects the Epistle is nothing but a prolonged plea to live worthily of the old traditions, and to hold fast to them in spite of all temptations to fall away. Typically Roman, too, is the entire absence from the Epistle of anything that can properly be called mysticism. There is no suggestion of a union with Christ or of a new life imparted by Him to believers. The Holy Spirit is regarded solely as the source of prophetic inspiration and of the charismatic gifts. The sacraments are barely alluded to, and of sacramental doctrine there is no trace. This absence of mysticism, which we shall have to consider more fully at a later stage, may be partly accounted for by the writer's temperament, and by his fidelity, in spite of Hellenistic culture, to the Hebraic and primitive Christian tradition. But it may also mark his connection with Roman Christianity, which in all its known phases, from the letter of Clement downwards, has shown itself averse to mystical specula-

tions. A similar conclusion may be drawn from the striking fact that the polemical motive plays hardly any part in the Epistle. Its one reference to "strange teachings" is of an incidental nature,[1] and concerns some ascetic tendency which does not seem to have affected any cardinal Christian belief. In other New Testament writings of approximately the same date heresy is already the burning question, but the writer to the Hebrews is content to leave it to one side. This silence, however else we may explain it, points to a church which as yet had been little troubled by false teaching, and Rome answers best to this condition. The attempt to drag Christianity into the syncretistic movement began in the East, and Ignatius does not use the language of mere compliment when he declares the Romans to be "filtered clear from every foreign stain." It is noticeable that the one reference to false doctrine in our Epistle touches on the same form of error with which Paul deals, in order to condone it, in the fourteenth chapter of his letter to the Romans. This coincidence must not be pressed, for an interval of about a generation lies between the two Epistles, not to speak of the cataclysm under Nero. But it is not impossible that the ascetic tendency of which Paul was aware had persisted in the Roman church, and had grown to be something of a danger to the higher religious interests.

On all these grounds the Roman destination of the Epistle is by far the most probable; but even if we

[1] He 13^{9}.

accept it a further difficulty arises. The writer has before his mind a homogeneous body of men who were exposed to the same temptations and were living under similar conditions. He could hardly have written in this manner to the whole Roman church, which was already a large body, including all sorts of members, from ignorant slaves to philosophers and scions of the imperial house. If the letter was addressed to Rome it must have been meant for one of the communities which carried on their separate life within the great church ; and a number of indications seem to point to a still more definite conclusion. The group in question was of a peculiar kind—made up of members who had been long converted and were now proceeding to higher instruction. It will be necessary later to dwell at some length on this conclusion, for it affords us, in some measure, the key to the Epistle. Much in the argument that would be otherwise inexplicable takes a new meaning when we think of the writer as addressing not so much an ordinary congregation as an inner circle of men who aspired to be teachers, and were aiming at deeper insight into their Christian faith.

The problem of the destination of the Epistle merges, however, in a much larger one. From an early time it has borne the title "To the Hebrews," and this conjecture of some ancient scholar embodies a view which has been endorsed by all subsequent criticism, down to our own time. The Epistle is based on assiduous

study of the Old Testament. It seeks to establish the worth and meaning of the new religion by contrasting it, in certain respects, with Judaism. From all this it has been inferred that the writer addresses a community of Jewish Christians, with the object of warning them against the danger of relapsing into their ancient faith. This view of his purpose has usually been accepted as self-evident, and has formed the starting-point of most interpretations of the Epistle; but the more it is examined the more we are compelled to question it. If our previous conclusions are admitted, it would fall to the ground almost of its own accord. Towards the end of the first century the cause for which Paul had fought had definitely triumphed, and Jewish Christianity had ceased to maintain itself outside of Palestine. In Rome especially, the division between the Jewish and Gentile sections of the church had been obliterated. Christianity had come face to face with its great practical task of overcoming the pagan world, and the old controversy about the claims of the Jewish ordinances could no longer be regarded as a living issue. It is hardly conceivable that in the cosmopolitan church of the capital, in the troubled interval between two fiery persecutions, there was still a community whose one concern was with the Jewish ritual, and which needed to be warned against its seductions by a long-drawn argument. But apart from these considerations of date and origin there are convincing reasons, grounded in the whole character of the Epistle, against

the traditional theory of its purpose. (1) The use of the Old Testament signifies nothing, for it was the acknowledged scripture of the church as well as of the synagogue. Purely Gentile writers, like the Apologists of the second century, employ it in just the same manner as our author, and no less constantly. An inquiry into the principles of Christianity, to whatever audience it might be addressed, would naturally take the form of an exposition of scripture, viewed in its bearing on the advent and work of Christ. Passages that dealt with the levitical ordinances were as much a part of scripture as any others, and as such had the right to be expounded for the purpose of Christian edification. (2) Not a word is said in the Epistle of apostasy to Judaism. The danger against which the readers are constantly warned is that of indifference, of failure to recognise the grandeur of Christianity and so live worthily of it. The writer is careful to say nothing that might disparage the claims of Judaism, for the old religion, though it had now been set aside, was the anticipation of the new. To this extent it possessed a divine significance, and those who slighted it were liable to the sternest punishment. If there was such value in the types, how much more in the realities! If God exacted a strict obedience to His will from those who had learned it imperfectly, what does He require of us, who are heirs of His new covenant? There is no question of reverting from the higher religion to that which has now served its day. The possibility of such a relapse does not enter into the writer's mind.

His sole concern is to impress on his readers the obligation that rests on them as children of the last days, in which all God's promises have been fulfilled. (3) The discussion in Hebrews turns wholly on the ritual ordinances, as set forth in the levitical books. Judaism, however, as it existed in the first century, was not a matter of ritual but of fidelity to the Law. Paul, to whom the Jewish peril was a very real one, never deems it necessary even once to utter warnings against the attractions of the Temple worship. He is well aware that it has ceased to be a vital element in the religion, and reserves all his criticism for the Law, which was the true menace to Christian faith. If it had been the purpose of the writer of Hebrews to guard his readers from the snares of Judaism, he would inevitably have fixed his attention on the Law. An attack on the ritual would indeed have been meaningless if he wrote, as he almost certainly did, after the Temple and all its observances had become things of the past. No one could now be in danger of relapsing into a type of Judaism which for centuries had been a mere survival, and had now completely vanished. (4) In any case, the Epistle deals throughout not with the Temple but with the half-mythical Tabernacle; and this of itself is sufficient evidence that no polemic against Judaism is intended. It is conceivable that in the generation following the destruction of the Temple there were groups of Christians who shared the regrets of their Jewish countrymen for the imposing ritual of their

fathers, and who contrasted it with the apparent poverty of Christian worship. But if the Epistle to the Hebrews was written for such belated votaries of the ancient ordinances it must sadly have missed its mark. It discusses them, not as they had been actually witnessed by men still living, but as they were pictured in old tradition. It takes no account whatever of the patriotic sentiment which might still attach itself, for Jewish Christians, to the historical shrine of their race. From the whole tenor of the argument we gather the impression that it was meant for readers to whom Jewish worship was a matter of remote and impersonal interest. Their knowledge of it had all been derived from the study of scripture, and on the scriptural presentation of it, not on the remembered facts, the discussion is based. (5) No reference is made in the Epistle to the division of Jew and Gentile. This is inexplicable if it is addressed to Jewish Christians, whose intense feeling of race and ancestral privilege would be their chief motive for relapsing to the earlier type of worship. Even if it were granted that the Epistle was written to some church in Palestine, for which the question of the admission of the Gentiles had never arisen in an acute form, the complete silence concerning it would be strange. After the time of Paul there could be no Jewish Christian sect, however encased in its old prejudices, which could simply ignore the mighty fact that Christianity was now appealing to the whole world, and that the world was responding. A writer "to the

Hebrews " could not have avoided at least some casual allusion to the great movement which was reacting in a hundred ways on the mission within Palestine itself. There can be only one explanation of the silence observed in our Epistle. It was written not for an audience that cared nothing for the larger gospel, but for one that recognised no other. Paul's victory was now complete, and in the church to which this letter was addressed, whether at Rome or elsewhere, the old barriers between Jew and Gentile had disappeared. It was possible to employ the language of scripture concerning Israel without any sense that it applied to a particular race, with a hereditary claim to be the people of God. A new Israel had arisen, united solely by the bonds of spiritual fellowship, and had entered into the promises which had been made to the fathers.

That the Epistle was written by a Jew is more than probable, although it is composed in purer Greek and has closer affinities with Greek philosophical ideas than any other New Testament book. The fundamental strain of its thought is Hebraic. It is marked throughout by an intimate knowledge of Jewish custom and a sympathy with Jewish history and institutions which a Gentile could hardly have acquired from mere study of the Old Testament. But whatever may have been his nationality the author was a man of broad culture, who made his protest against tendencies which affected the church as a whole and not merely some reactionary sect of Jewish ritualists. This conclusion,

which has gained an ever wider acceptance in recent years, may be regarded as one of the most important results of modern New Testament criticism, and has placed us for the first time in a position to understand the real drift of the Epistle. By so doing it has thrown a new light for us on that period, perhaps the most decisive in Christian history, when the church of the Apostles was transforming itself into the later Catholic church. Our Epistle has come down to us out of the heart of that period. It has come, we have every reason to believe, from the Roman church, which was responsible, above all others, for the transformation. In this writing, if anywhere, we may look for an answer to some of the most difficult questions in the history of our religion. So long as the old theory was unchallenged, the Epistle was a document of secondary value. At most it could only testify to the survival of a remnant of Jewish Christians, who were impervious to the forces that were operating in the church at large. The ideas prevailing in an isolated community of this kind—a community that can never have exercised much influence and must soon have disappeared—were rightly felt to be of minor consequence, and the evidence of Hebrews was almost passed over in the attempt to trace the early development. But we can approach the study of the Epistle with a new interest when we have rid ourselves of misleading views as to its origin. It belongs not to some obscure side-current, but to the main stream of Christian progress. By an inquiry

into its teaching we may hope to determine, in some measure, how the mind of the church was moving in an age that was pregnant with great issues, and has left its impress on the Christianity of all later times.

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CHAPTER II.

PURPOSE AND CHARACTER.

The Epistle to the Hebrews appears at first sight to be a theological treatise—the earliest in Christian literature. On better grounds than many of the works of the Fathers it might have borne a definite title, such as "The Priesthood of Christ," or "Concerning the true worship." But the author himself describes it, in the closing chapter, as "a word of exhortation," and there can be little doubt that in this phrase he has summed up his main purpose. Again and again he speaks the language of direct warning and encouragement. At each new turn of his exposition he pauses, in order to drive home the practical import of what may have seemed a purely abstract doctrine. As he draws towards the end the theological discussion is merged almost entirely in a passionate religious appeal. This hortatory strain which runs through the Epistle cannot be regarded as subsidiary or conventional, for it is bound up in the closest manner with the argument as a whole. It deals, moreover, with no mere pious generalities, but has a direct bearing on a given situation which is vividly present to the writer's mind.

He contemplates a circle of readers whose faith has been weakened, not so much by positive doubt as by a failure of courage and perseverance. On the assumption that he writes for "Hebrews" it has generally been inferred that he fears a relapse, on the part of a Jewish Christian community, towards the ancestral mode of worship; but there is nothing in the Epistle that supports such a view. The danger against which the readers are warned is not that of falling away to another religion, but that of growing slothful and indifferent in the religion which they profess. Once or twice, indeed, it is suggested that they may be tempted to actual apostasy, but this possibility is touched upon only to be rejected with horror. For those who have been once enlightened and have yet given up their faith there can be no repentance, and the writer is convinced, in spite of his worst misgivings, that his readers are in no such deadly peril. What he fears, rather, is their "drifting away"—their failure to remain steadfast. Their religion is becoming dull and mechanical—no longer sustaining them in the difficult present with a consciousness of their great calling.

From various hints in the Epistle we can gather the reasons of this mood of indifference. It was partly a consequence of persecution—all the more difficult to bear because it was not of the kind which evoked heroic effort. Under the contempt and ill-usage of their heathen neighbours the believers had grown weary, and were half-ashamed of a religion which involved

them in social ostracism. The pressure from without had discouraged them the more easily because of grave inward weakness. There had been little endeavour to rise to a higher Christian life. The elementary beliefs and doctrines were accepted as a matter of course, and there seemed to be no desire for the larger knowledge which was the necessary condition of a more ardent and effectual faith. But apart from all the special causes which had lowered the vitality of the church, it was suffering from an exhaustion due to mere lapse of time. The Epistle is written to Christians of the second or third generation, for whom the new religion had lost its freshness and wonder. The earlier glow of conviction had given place to a mood of lassitude, and in some measure of disillusionment. There might be no visible departure from the gospel which had been proclaimed by the primitive Apostles, but unconsciously men had lost their hold on its essential meaning. As we read between the lines of the Epistle we become aware of spiritual conditions which must have caused anxiety to many earnest minds in the last quarter of the first century. A splendid enthusiasm like that of the Apostolic Age was in its nature temporary, and had been followed by the inevitable reaction. The great personalities of the earlier period had now disappeared; the spiritual gifts had ceased to manifest themselves, or no longer bore their mysterious character; the hope of the Parousia had grown fainter, and did not now supply a living inspiration. The Epistle to the

Hebrews has come to us out of that interval of transition, when the energies of the church were, for the time being, spent. In the succeeding age it had adapted itself to the new conditions, and an elaborate system of doctrine, government, sacramental piety was in course of formation, and partly made up for the loss of the early spontaneity. But our Epistle was written in the period of reaction. Christianity had ceased to be an enthusiasm, and had not yet taken shape as an ordered system ; and the most urgent task for its leaders was to revive the flagging activities of their people. For this purpose it was no longer enough to repeat the watch-words to which the earlier generation had responded, for these had now lost their virtue. The message had to be so presented as to provide new motives, instead of those which had quickened the zeal of the church in the primitive age.

But while the Epistle is a hortatory discourse, it is peculiar in this—that the exhortation is closely interwoven with a theological argument. In order to inspire his readers with a new ardour for their religion, the author undertakes to demonstrate its surpassing value. It is apparently his conviction that their failure to hold fast is chiefly due to a lack of insight and appreciation. They have not realised the grandeur of Christianity. They have taken their obligations lightly because they do not feel that it is intrinsically different from all other religions, and the chief thing necessary is to exhibit it to them in its true character. So in the majestic open-

ing sentence of the Epistle a thesis is laid down which is developed, on various sides, in the discussion that follows. To former ages God had spoken through earthly messengers—imparting His truth in many broken lights, by vision and symbol and prophecy. Now at last He has spoken by His Son, who has not only given us the perfect revelation of His will, but has removed the barriers which kept us distant from Him. In other words, Christianity is the final and absolute religion. It has carried to fulfilment the strivings and anticipations of earlier forms of worship. It has lifted us out of the domain of shadows and has brought us face to face with divine realities. This conception of Christianity as the final religion determines the whole thought of the Epistle, and it was one which appealed with a peculiar force to the writer's age. The imperial work of Rome had now borne its fruit in the creation of a larger consciousness, in which the old distinctions of race and nationality were lost. It was no longer possible to think of all religions as equally true and valid—each of them making its separate claim on the nation which had inherited it. Thoughtful men were compelled to examine and compare the different religions which in the great cosmopolitan cities had now their temples side by side. They were confronted by the question whether, amidst the multiplicity, there might not be one ultimate religion, in which the conflicting forms of faith should find their realisation. This quest for the one religion was the

underlying aim of the syncretism which was so marked a feature of that first century. It may likewise be traced in the effort of Philo to harmonise Greek and perhaps Egyptian ideas with the Jewish Law, and in that of the Stoic thinkers to break away from all traditional beliefs and replace them by a cult of reason. The Christian missionaries could not but be influenced, more or less consciously, by the desire to present their gospel as the one all-embracing truth for which the world was seeking. With the Apologists of the second century this desire takes definite shape. They start from the assumption that in Christ the divine Logos, which has been operative in human life from the beginning, and has partially revealed itself in all forms of truth, has become fully manifest. In Christianity, therefore, the world is to recognise the final religion. Jews and Gentiles, votaries of all creeds and philosophies, will find their differences reconciled in this new message which has gathered into itself all the messages that have ever come to men from God. The writer to the Hebrews is in this respect, as in not a few others, the forerunner of the Apologists; but while they work, almost solely, with the idea of revelation, he dwells upon it only in his opening sentences. The finality of the new religion, as he apprehends it, consists in this — that it has established the perfect worship. All the spiritual endeavour of past ages has at last come to fruition, since in Christ we have obtained a direct and perpetual access to God.

The Epistle thus takes the form of a demonstration of the absolute worth of Christianity; but in the working out of his argument the author never loses sight of his practical aim. He is not concerned with any abstract question as to the nature and value of Christian truth, but addresses a particular group of men who are in danger of falling away. How can he persuade them to a stronger faith and constancy? How can he make them proud of their confession, and more keenly alive to the solemn obligations which it lays upon them? The doctrinal discussion, remote as it sometimes appears to be from any practical interest, has no other object than to add weight to the exhortation. By means of it he seeks to establish the paramount claim of Christianity. He impresses on his readers that the religion which they profess to follow is God's last word to men, and that they will be unfaithful to it at their peril.

The Epistle turns, then, on the thesis that Christianity is the final religion, and the method by which this thesis is affirmed is a peculiar and at first sight an inadequate one. A contrast is drawn between the gospel as the "new covenant," and the "old covenant" which had been given in Judaism, and it is shown that at every point the new covenant stands on a higher plane. This superiority to the ancient type of worship is accepted as sufficient proof that in Christianity we have the absolute religion. In one respect, therefore, the

writer's horizon is much narrower than that of other Christian thinkers with whom we naturally compare him. Paul takes account of a revelation which had been vouchsafed to the Gentiles. The Fourth Evangelist sees in Christ the true Light—the incarnation of the Logos which has ever been the light of the world. The Apologists think of the gospel as the perfect expression of a truth which has been dimly discerned from the beginning, and which is reflected in Greek poetry and philosophy as well as in the Law and the Prophets. But the writer of Hebrews appears to acknowledge no valid religion outside of Judaism. In the very sentence in which he identifies Christ with the Logos he limits all previous revelation to that which was given "to our fathers by the prophets." Christianity is for him the final religion in so far as it has consummated the mode of worship which is enjoined in the Old Testament.

Not only does he confine himself to Judaism, but he looks at Judaism in only one aspect, and on the face of it a subordinate one. The Law becomes for him the ritual, as laid down in the levitical books, and his discussion takes the form of a contrast of this ritual of the Tabernacle with the higher worship in which we participate as Christians. We cannot suppose that his identification of the Law with the ritual observances was due to defective knowledge. That priesthood and sacrifice were quite secondary elements in Judaism must have been apparent to all who had the least acquaintance with it—much more to one who was

probably himself a Jew, and who, in any case, was deeply versed in Jewish literature and tradition. His concentration on the ritual may be partly set down to the exigencies of his theme. Taking his departure from certain scriptural passages which speak of priesthood, he is led, in his interpretation of them, to consider the priestly idea to the exclusion of all others. But his selection of these passages is not a matter of accident. It has to be explained, as we shall see more fully at a later stage, from an attitude of mind which sees in worship the central fact of religion. By the Law which he had bestowed on His ancient people, how had God provided for their access to Him in worship? This is the question with which our author approaches the Old Testament, and on the answer to it he bases his consideration of the work of Christ.

It is now necessary, however, to examine more carefully a point which has been already touched on, and which has an intimate bearing on the character and scope of the Epistle. The audience addressed is not, as in the case of the Pauline letters, the whole Christian community, but a group within the community—a group of the more advanced and enlightened believers. This may be gathered from a number of allusions in the course of the Epistle. Its readers have passed beyond the mere "elements of the doctrine of Christ," and expect the instruction which is suitable for the τέλειοι—for those who are intelligent and

mature.[1] They have been so long learning that they ought themselves to be qualified to act as teachers,[2] and their backwardness is the more culpable in view of their special opportunities. In the parting admonitions they are enjoined to "take the oversight" of their brethren,[3] "making straight paths" [4] in which the weaker may follow them without danger or misgiving. The evidence of these explicit allusions is borne out by the fact already noted, that polemical motives are almost entirely absent from the Epistle. Not only is it written to Rome, where the prevailing heresies had made less headway than elsewhere, but it is addressed to a select circle, made up of Christians of assured standing, who all shared in the same general convictions. In such a circle there would be no place for those doubtful converts who formed a considerable part of all the larger communities, and who were caught most easily by the allurements of the false doctrines.

Not a few of the peculiarities of the Epistle appear in their true light when we thus learn to regard it as written by a teacher for teachers. Its recondite exegesis, the abstruseness of much of its reasoning, the academical cast of its language, would all have been out of place in a work of popular edification. They are relieved of any suggestion of pedantry or display when we think of the author as speaking, as it were, in the classroom, to an audience that was able to meet him on equal terms. But the fact that he contemplates

[1] He 6^{1}. [2] 5^{12}. [3] 12^{15}. [4] 12^{13}.

such an audience, has implications of a far-reaching nature which it will be well to consider in some detail.

From various references in the early literature we know that it was customary in the post-Apostolic church to impart a higher and a lower kind of instruction. This custom seems to have had its origin in quite primitive times, and in Mark's Gospel is attributed to Jesus himself. The multitude, we are told, was incapable of receiving more than the superficial drift of his message, but to the disciples it was given "to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God." To them he was accustomed to expound all things in private, revealing the deeper import of those truths which the others could only perceive externally. That this account is based on a misapprehension of Jesus' method there can be little doubt; but the practice he was supposed to follow was that which was actually in vogue in the early church. Paul explicitly tells us that this was his own procedure. While in his ordinary teaching he confined himself to the simple verities of the Christian message, without any attempt at eloquence or profound thought, he yet possessed a "wisdom" which he disclosed "among them that were perfect" (ἐν τοῖς τελείοις).[1] This declaration of Paul has been used by some recent scholars to support the theory that Christianity had assumed the guise of a mystery cult, with its inner circle of initiates to whom the deeper secrets were divulged. But there is no reason to force this meaning into the words. The

[1] 1 Co 2[6, 7].

τέλειοι to whom Paul refers were not initiates in any technical sense, but simply the "full-grown"—the more mature disciples who had proceeded to a higher grade of Christian knowledge. In all the primitive churches there must have been a marked distinction between the recent converts, who were still uncertain as to the fundamental principles of the new faith and morality, and those who had attained to something like a real insight. Every teacher must have recognised the necessity of separating the two classes for the purposes of instruction. From the statement of Paul we can infer no more than this—that in his intercourse with the more advanced converts his teaching took a wider range than in his ordinary work as a missionary. Instead of confining himself to the fixed beliefs which were essential to a saving faith, he was able to unfold and supplement them—offering his own interpretations of the work of Christ.

But though there was nothing occult, or, in most cases, very profound, about this higher instruction, it played an all-important part in the development of Christian thought. For one thing, it was inevitable that in this field a large liberty should be permitted to the individual thinker. While in his regular teaching he was bound down to the tradition, and felt himself responsible for transmitting faithfully the primary truths of the gospel, he could give scope among his more advanced disciples to his own reflections. His aim was not so much to reiterate what they knew already as to

provoke them to further thought, and to draw out the hidden consequences of the accepted beliefs. A field was thus opened, in connection with the higher teaching, for the elaboration of doctrine, in such a manner as eventually to change its character. Paul, for example, in the passage referred to, appears to describe his "wisdom" as concerned with the divine plan whereby the powers of darkness which had conspired against Jesus were made the instruments of their own destruction. A speculative theory of this kind was in no wise inconsistent with the normal Christian tradition. Its purpose was merely to reflect on the apocalyptic beliefs, and so to apply them as to enhance the significance of the Incarnation and the Cross. But it is not difficult to see how such constructions might take a purely fantastic form, and open the door to ideas which were not only foreign to the Christian message, but were subversive of its first principles. Teachers who were in sympathy with pagan thought would attempt to blend the new doctrines with the current mythology, under colour of exploring their background or tracing out their deeper implications. Within the lifetime of Paul himself the church was threatened with various forms of error in which we can discern the familiar features of the later Gnosticism.

The speculations which were thrown out from time to time in the course of the higher instruction were already known by the name of Gnosis, although no sinister meaning had attached itself to the term. On

the contrary, Paul recognises in the search for "knowledge" one of the legitimate and necessary activities of Christian piety. He takes for granted that those who accept the new beliefs are not to rest satisfied with the bare tradition. They ought to feel impelled, by their very faith in it, to examine and ponder it, and so to arrive, by the guidance of the Spirit, at a fuller understanding of its import. The term γνῶσις was applied to this interpretation of the tradition, and as a Christian word it continued to bear the shade of meaning which it had acquired in Hellenistic Greek. It denoted, as we gather from the religious literature of the time, not so much knowledge in the larger sense as the knowledge of secret things—of the nature and counsels of God, the destiny of the soul, the mysteries of the future and of the unseen world. Since it was thus occupied with matters beyond the range of human intelligence it was supposed to be supernaturally given. It was a revealed knowledge, attainable not by a process of conscious seeking, but by direct illumination. In Christian usage the word retained its well-understood meaning, but was adapted, at the same time, to the new system of ideas. The church regarded itself as the community of the Spirit, and in all Christian activity a mysterious power was assumed to be operative—discernible in thoughts and impulses which might seem in themselves to be purely natural. For Paul there was no clear distinction between his own thinking and the knowledge which came to him from the Spirit. He

believed that as the Apostle of Christ he was not dependent on "man's wisdom," but drew directly from a higher source of inspiration. So among Christians generally the idea of γνῶσις was capable of a wide extension. Any member of the spiritual community who was gifted with superior powers of insight and reflection was free to regard himself as a vehicle of the Spirit. It is significant that when Paul remonstrates with the intellectuals at Corinth he does not question the higher origin of their knowledge, but only maintains that there are other gifts of the Spirit more to be prized than this one. In so far as any distinction was made between γνῶσις and ordinary knowledge it consisted in this—that γνῶσις was primarily concerned with *mysteries*. The idea of what constituted a "mystery" was itself ill-defined; but, broadly speaking, the term was applied to the inner purpose of a given institution or doctrine or belief. The first duty of the missionary was to impart the common tradition, which it was necessary that men should receive before they could call themselves disciples of Christ. But when the convert had become τέλειος, when he had attained to a certain maturity in his Christian life, he was expected to ponder the elementary truths and discover what lay beneath and behind them. What was the nature of the change that came about through Baptism? In what manner had the death of Christ operated that it should atone for sins? How are the dead raised, and with what body do they come? As time went on, and under

the pressure of Hellenistic influences, these and similar questions assumed a more and more important place, and after the turn of the century religion was construed, to a great extent, in terms of knowledge. In the primitive age it was recognised clearly that faith was the essential thing, but a value was already set on knowledge, as the indispensable means towards a larger and surer faith.

This inquiry into the nature of Gnosis has been necessary for the purpose of understanding the true character of our Epistle. We approach it from a wrong point of view if we regard it simply as a normal example of Christian teaching in the latter part of the first century. When due weight is allowed to a number of indications, we have rather to consider it as a Gnosis communicated by a revered teacher to a select circle of his disciples. The author is aware that his doctrine is "hard to interpret," and introduces it, not without misgivings, after he has prepared the way by many preliminary hints. He is anxious to convince himself that his readers are indeed "full-grown," with their senses so exercised in judgment that the "solid food" which he offers will duly nourish them. It does not follow from the guarded manner in which his doctrine is divulged that it is in any respect a secret one. No strange esoteric terms are employed as in later Gnosticism, and we know, from the references to it in early writings, that the Epistle was in general circula-

tion from the first. Moreover, while its message is confessedly novel and unfamiliar, it is in no sense contradictory to the accepted tradition. The writer is careful to lead up to it by insisting on the cardinal beliefs on which all Christians are agreed, and makes it clear that his own contribution is meant to be nothing more than a fuller development of those beliefs. His object is not to change the gospel into something different, but to interpret it. Nevertheless, his teaching, at whatever point we examine it, has all the characteristics of Gnosis. His mind is consciously directed to things "within the veil." He declares, in so many words, that "the world to come is the subject of our discussion."[1] In his effort to penetrate the secrets of that unseen world he takes his departure from a cryptic passage of the Old Testament, and seeks, with the aid of the Spirit, to expound the dark intimations which the Spirit has given in scripture. It is true that his method is one of conscious reflection, and that the Gnosis which he propounds has little to distinguish it from ordinary speculation. But he assumes, like Paul, that the activities of his own mind are subject to a higher direction. This new doctrine, based on an exegesis which to us may appear frigid and artificial, has come to him by a divine illumination and bears the authentic marks of Gnosis.

We may now attempt, in the light of these conclusions, to define the scope and purpose of the Epistle.

[1] He 2^5.

An eminent teacher, believing that he has arrived at a truer and deeper conception of the work of Christ, communicates his discovery to a group of his more mature disciples for whom the bare elements of Christian instruction are no longer sufficient. He is convinced that the doctrine which he expounds is in full harmony with the accepted faith. He finds it adumbrated in passages of scripture which are no doubt mysterious, but which reveal their meaning to the mind that has been duly enlightened. Nevertheless it is a new doctrine, a Gnosis, and he lays it before his readers with a certain reserve. He speaks to them not in the name of the official church, but as an individual thinker who has arrived at this interpretation along a path of his own.

Two points have thus to be emphasised in our study of the Epistle. It is concerned, in the first place, with a particular doctrine, which is purposely kept in the foreground to the exclusion of others. The writer is indeed assured that this doctrine is of paramount value, but he does not intend that it should cover his whole understanding of the Christian message. Perhaps there is nothing that has so obscured and complicated the teaching of the Epistle as the common assumption that it contains a whole system of theology, complete in itself. When it is so construed it presents gaps and oversights which are quite inexplicable, and cannot be brought into intelligible relation to the known development of early Christian thought. We must not try to extract from it more than it professes to offer.

The author is at pains to impress on us that he acquiesces in the ordinary teaching, and takes his departure at the point where it leaves off. It forms the necessary foundation for his thought and must everywhere be taken into account, but he does not try to deal with it more than incidentally. The theme which occupies him is his new speculation—the profounder doctrine in which he advances on the normal beliefs.

On the other hand, the very fact that he thus aims at advancing is proof that he has travelled all the way with the church. At first sight it might appear as if he were a daring innovator, who had set himself to express the cardinal ideas of the gospel in more adequate forms. His theology has often been regarded from this point of view, as constituting a type by itself. But as we examine it more closely we shall see reason to conclude that it agrees in the main with the teaching which had become prevalent in the church towards the end of the first century. The one element in it which is new and peculiar is the doctrine of the priesthood of Christ, and this doctrine is not the outcome of any remoulding of traditional ideas. It is built upon them as on the acknowledged basis of all further truth, and cannot be understood apart from them. With all his gifts of eloquence and spiritual insight the writer of Hebrews is not a creative mind in the same sense as Paul and the Fourth Evangelist. He does not try to think out the Christian message for himself and embody it in new and more vital categories. He is content to take his stand

on the Confession, as it had already shaped itself in the mind of the church, and to work out one particular doctrine to its further issues.

When we thus read the Epistle as a Gnosis, addressed to a special group of the more enlightened converts, we can better understand its hortatory, as well as its theological motive. It is indeed true that most of its warnings against indifference and faint-heartedness are applicable to any community, but they acquire a new significance when they are connected with a more definite aim. They contemplate a body of readers on whom a responsibility was laid as the leaders and examples who were to "make straight paths" for their weaker brethren. On the part of such men there must be no relapsing into a lifeless, perfunctory religion. If the ardour of the former days was to be rekindled in the church at large, it must not be allowed to grow cold in those who aspired to be teachers. It is not a little remarkable that hardly anything is said in the Epistle of the open and flagrant sins which Christian missionaries had constant occasion to rebuke. The letters of Paul, written for communities which included all sorts of members, at all stages of religious discipline, are full of warnings against such sins, while in Hebrews they are barely touched on. This is intelligible on no other theory than that the readers were little exposed to the grosser vices. They formed a select circle, capable of a higher discipline, and had presumably

outgrown the half-pagan morality which was still rife among the more recent converts. On the other hand, the lassitude and formalism with which they are upbraided were precisely the dangers to which a spiritual élite of this kind would be most liable. The very fact that they had risen above the vulgar temptations would encourage them in a mood of self-complacency. They would be prone to rest satisfied with what they had achieved already, and by their failure to press forward to new knowledge would relax their hold even of "the elements of the doctrine of Christ."

If its readers were such as we have described, the Epistle becomes in the fullest sense a "word of exhortation." On the face of it the ardent appeal which breaks out at intervals is weakened by the long-drawn theological argument. How could men be roused to stronger faith and endeavour by this laboured comparison of the work of Christ with that of the levitical high priest? Paul, when he sought to revive his churches in Corinth and Galatia, pointed them away from difficult speculations to the simple facts of the gospel. Why does the writer of Hebrews employ just the opposite method—a method which was bound, as all experience has taught us, to defeat its own ends? But his exhortation must be considered in the light of its special object. He has a situation before him entirely different from that in Corinth, where converts new to Christianity were neglecting its elementary demands in their premature zeal for "knowledge."

His audience consists of men who, in view of their long association with the church, were its natural teachers. They had fully mastered the elements, but had failed to advance in knowledge; and this carelessness about the deeper meaning of their religion had made them cold and timid and half-hearted. It is the writer's deliberate purpose to quicken in them that desire for "knowledge" in which they are lacking. He takes the "elements" for granted, and bids them try to follow him into fresh regions of thought, in which they will meet with "things hard to understand." By this intellectual effort they will be shaken out of their lethargy. Their religion will mean more to them, and they will respond to its demands more ardently, when they have thus braced themselves to grapple with its problems.

The abstruseness of the argument, therefore, is itself a factor in its hortatory purpose. It might seem as if the resolve to let first principles alone and pass on to something higher, betrayed a false conception of the message of Christ. The simplest Christian truths are also the greatest and most vital, and we have gained but little when we imagine ourselves to have transcended them. From the days of the Gnostics until now Christianity has only been impoverished by all the repeated efforts to ally it with high-sounding philosophies. But is it not equally true that it ceases to be a living force when the intellectual problems involved in it are left wholly to one side? In all ages of the church the

purely religious development has gone hand in hand with the endeavour to press on to a higher knowledge. Often, as we can now perceive, this endeavour has taken a wrong direction, and has resulted in futile theories from which a later generation has had to liberate itself. But even so it has served to quicken, for the time being, the pulses of the religious life. Where the intellectual effort, however misdirected, has given place to mere indolent acquiescence, the church, in all phases of its activity, has fallen back to a lower plane. Emphasis has often been laid on the danger of allowing the speculative interest in religion to overshadow the practical. It is doubtless a very real danger, and in a time like ours, when the right of critical inquiry has been extended to the field of religion, it must be carefully guarded against. Religion is something different from mere strenuous thinking on the great religious questions. Yet it still remains true that faith and knowledge are inseparable, and that both grow stronger as they react on one another. More often than we know the failure of religion, as a moral power, is due to no other cause than intellectual sloth. Accepting their beliefs as a matter of custom, men have allowed them to grow hollow and meaningless, and have not sought to deepen and renew them, and make them adequate to expanding needs. The desire to understand more fully what has been given us in the gospel is the safeguard, as it is also the surest index, of a living obedience. This is the conviction that underlies the Epistle to the

Hebrews, and makes it, even in its subtle argumentative chapters, a true "word of exhortation." It is the protest, offered us in the New Testament itself, against a piety which is afraid to link itself with an advancing knowledge, and which thereby loses its sympathy even with the first principles of the doctrine of Christ.

CHAPTER III.

THEOLOGICAL AFFINITIES.

The Epistle to the Hebrews stands by itself in the New Testament, but its isolation is in many respects more apparent than real. Its author, while he imparts a new and peculiar doctrine, takes his stand on the common beliefs of the church, and never questions their validity, although he works them out to unexpected issues. Even the ideas that constitute his Gnosis are not altogether novel. Traces of them can be discovered in one and another of the New Testament books, and in the literature of the second century they have many striking parallels. It is evident that our Epistle, in spite of its half-esoteric character, is something more than the manifesto of an individual thinker. As much as any of the writings that are generally singled out as representative, it reflects the broad movement which was going forward within the church. We cannot understand its teaching or form a just estimate of its historical value, until we have related it to the various forces which were moulding Christian thought in the latter part of the first century.

The question which meets us at the outset in any attempt to trace the affinities of the Epistle is that of its connection with Paul. We have already seen that the theory of its Pauline origin is unsupported by any external evidence, and breaks down completely when its structure and language, and much more the whole tenor of its teaching, are critically examined. It has nothing to say of the characteristic Pauline doctrines—Justification by faith, union with Christ in his death and resurrection, the destruction of the sinful flesh, the regenerating power of the Spirit. Its thought is entirely untouched by the Pauline mysticism. It knows nothing of Paul's grand contention that the Law and the gospel are radically opposed to one another. In the course of the Epistle we indeed meet continually with Pauline terms—faith, sanctification, redemption, but they carry a meaning altogether different from that which they bear for Paul. The use of them serves only to mark a profound divergence from his whole mode of thinking. Apart from these more general terms, we occasionally catch an echo of specific Pauline phrases or ideas. The death of Christ is described, in words which recall a well-known passage in Romans, as a redemption of sins committed under the old covenant.[1] It is declared, in language which Paul himself might have used, that by his death Christ destroyed the devil, who had the power of death.[2] As in Paul, the simpler and the higher instruction are contrasted as milk for

[1] He 9^{15}; cf. Ro 3^{25}. [2] 2^{14}.

babes and meat for grown men.[1] The great proof-text of Paulinism—"the just shall live by faith"—is quoted, and Abraham is held up as the classical example of faith.[2] But such coincidences signify little. The writer, like Paul, avails himself of ideas which were current in the early Christian communities, and employs them, independently of Paul, with a context of his own.

In so far as a real affinity can be discovered between Paul and the author of Hebrews, it must be sought in the broad assumptions on which they both rest their interpretation of the gospel. For both of them Christ has become something more than the traditional Messiah. his life on earth is only an episode in a larger life, which includes his pre-existence and his return to glory. His death is the grand consummation and the very purpose of his life. Emphasis is laid not so much on his teaching as on the work he accomplished, and chiefly on the work which he now accomplishes as the exalted Lord. The redemption offered by Christianity is viewed not merely as a future, but as an inward and present deliverance. These agreements and others like them are unmistakable, but they are not to be set down to any immediate contact. They belong, rather, to the new Christianity which had come into being in consequence of the Gentile mission, and of which Paul was only one of many representatives. The writer of Hebrews is a child of the Hellenistic culture, and employs the conceptions which were native to it in his presentation of

[1] He 5^{12}; cf. 1 Co 3^{2}. [2] 10^{38} 11^{8}.

the gospel. Paul had employed them before him for the same reason, and we can discern them, under various disguises, in all the religious thinking of the age, pagan as well as Christian.

The more closely we examine the Epistle the more we perceive that it is different, not only in its main conceptions but in the whole texture of its thought, from the writings of Paul. To some extent this may be explained by a difference in temperament between the two thinkers. The mind of Paul is ardent, intuitive, mystical, while the writer of Hebrews is grave and reflective. Religion for him has its basis in "reverence and godly fear." His thoughts are few and weighty, and he unfolds them deliberately, and comes back to them repeatedly till he has exhausted their full import. For such a thinker it would have been difficult to place himself in complete sympathy with Paul's teaching, even though he had been thoroughly versed in it. But there is no indication that it was familiar to him. He makes no quotations from Paul, and does not allude, even indirectly, to the Epistles or their author. Again and again he traverses ground that had already been covered by Paul, but of this he betrays no consciousness. It is not the least perplexing of the riddles of Hebrews that a teacher who wrote within a generation of Paul's death, a teacher, moreover, whose reference to Timothy implies a certain contact with the Pauline circle, should apparently be quite unaffected by the work of the great Apostle. However the fact is to be

explained, its significance for early Christian history cannot be overlooked. It is perhaps the most striking of a number of evidences that the influence of Paul on his own age was by no means so all-pervading as is generally supposed. In spite of his splendid boldness and originality, or rather for the very reason that he stood so high above the common level of Christian intelligence, he failed to direct the main course of the development. That the writer of Hebrews was well acquainted with the name of Paul and regarded him as a great and venerable figure, we cannot doubt. But it does not follow that he knew Paul's interpretation of the gospel, much less that he accepted it as carrying with it an unquestionable authority.

Our author, however, although independent of Paul, belonged like him to the Hellenistic section of the church, and construed the gospel in terms of Hellenistic ideas. As they appear in Paul these ideas are saturated in the religious mysticism of the age. They have passed into Hebrews through the medium of philosophical speculation, and more particularly of that philosophy which had grown up at Alexandria, with Philo as its outstanding exponent. The Alexandrian influence is so apparent that many have singled it out as the one moulding element in the Epistle. We shall find reason to question this view, but the relations to Alexandrian thought are everywhere traceable, and may be briefly indicated. (1) Philo and the writer of

Hebrews are both biblical theologians, who advance to new doctrines by an elucidation of the hidden purport of the Old Testament. They assume that scripture is the immediate utterance of the Spirit, and that its statements have therefore an absolute value. They seek to arrive at the ultimate solution of all problems not by abstract reasoning, but by investigating the data of scripture. (2) In this investigation they employ a method which to the modern mind is altogether arbitrary. Every utterance of scripture is supposed to convey a spiritual as well as a literal reference, and the chief aim of the expositor is to discover this underlying sense of the divine word. He is guided in his quest by no uniform principle, but trusts in each case to his gift of spiritual intuition. The exegesis thus resolves itself into a free play of fancy and conjecture around the suggestions thrown out by the text. (3) The theory of a twofold sense involved in the words of scripture is only an aspect of the *symbolism* which pervades all the thought of the two writers. The visible world, as they apprehend it, is nothing but the reflection of a higher world, in which it finds its true meaning and reality. As in their exposition of scripture they try to reach the spirit through the letter, so in their interpretation of all the work of God they accept the material forms as merely signs and shadows, whose value consists in something that lies beyond them. The task of the enlightened mind is to raise itself, through contemplation of the symbols, to knowledge of the divine realities.

(4) They are both preoccupied with the idea of *worship*. Religion, in their view, is identical with the true worship of God, and they therefore transfer to the ritual all the significance which in ordinary Judaism was attached to the Law. For both of them, moreover, the idea of worship is closely connected with that of mediation. Philo works with a system of abstract conceptions, and the Christian writer with the gospel tradition; but they are at one in the fundamental thought that man, under earthly conditions, is shut out from the higher world. He must find access to God through a power that reaches into his own life while participating in the divine nature. (5) For Philo the mediation is effected by the Logos, which corresponds at once with the creative Word of the Old Testament and the immanent Reason of Stoicism; and to this Logos he ascribes a certain personality as a second divine principle. In Hebrews the term Logos is never expressly used, but in the opening chapter we have unmistakable reference to the doctrine, which is outlined almost in the very language of Philo. The Christology of the Epistle, as we shall see later, is profoundly influenced by this Philonic conception. (6) The writer of Hebrews adopts an idea of Faith which bears a striking resemblance to that of Philo. Indeed it may safely be affirmed that on this side of his teaching he is far more closely akin to Philo than to his Christian predecessors. (7) A number of phrases and metaphors and allusions can be collected from the Epistle which might be urged as

proof of a direct dependence on the works of Philo. But we must be careful not to attach an undue value to such coincidences. In the religious literature of every age there are images and expressions which are common property, especially among writers who represent the same general type of thought and outlook. Verbal similarities must be supported by other evidences before they can be held to signify a conscious borrowing.

These, then, are the main directions in which the writer of Hebrews betrays his affinity with Philo. It is clear that he has been powerfully affected by Alexandrian ideas; yet we mistake the whole character of his thinking if we construe it, without any reserve, as Alexandrian. When it is examined more closely we become aware of differences from Philo which are no less noteworthy than the agreements.

(1) The method of exegesis employed in Hebrews is not the allegorical method of Philo, but is more nearly akin to that of the Rabbinical schools. It consists not so much in attenuating the letter of scripture as in emphasising it—examining it, so to speak, under the microscope, in order to ascertain its full implication. For example, the mention of a *new* covenant by Jeremiah is made to yield the meaning that already in the prophet's day the first covenant was growing old and was destined soon to disappear. The words of the Psalm, "to-day, if ye will hear his voice," are construed as defining a given period, set by God, within which an opportunity is offered of entering into the promised

rest. The "rest" itself, by a subtle insistence on the literal context, is interpreted as a Sabbath rest in store for God's people. Similar illustrations might be adduced from almost every chapter. The exegetical method is no less arbitrary than that of Philo, and aims at the same discovery of a spiritual meaning underneath the literal one. But it is not, properly speaking, the method of allegory which was distinctive of the Alexandrian school.

(2) The difference which comes to light in the exegetical method may be traced in the symbolism generally. Both writers have much to say about the events of Old Testament history and the institutions of Jewish worship; but in Philo they are treated allegorically. The material facts, although a certain value is allowed to them, are resolved into philosophical ideas, moral qualities, moods and processes of the inward life. The intercession of the high priest becomes a sort of picture of the ascent to God through the agency of the Logos; the New Jerusalem is figurative of the condition of the soul when it is at last set free from the bondage of ignorance and passion.[1] But in Hebrews the fact is not thus volatilised into some purely spiritual equivalent. It is regarded, on the contrary, as the mere shadow or copy of some fact which strictly corresponds with it and which possesses a far more real existence. Thus the New Jerusalem is the abode of angels and redeemed men — a city in heaven of which the

[1] *De Somn.* ii. 251.

actual Jerusalem is nothing but the dim reflection. The official high priest, making intercession in the visible sanctuary, is the type of an ideal, eternal High Priest, who represents his people in the true dwelling-place of God. Everywhere in the Epistle the symbolism is of this character. It proceeds on the assumption that the higher world is the world of realities, and that things on earth are only the copies of heavenly patterns. This typology of Hebrews has indeed been strongly influenced by the Philonic idealism, but it must not by any means be confounded with it. In his conception of the two worlds the author does not attach himself directly to Alexandrian philosophy, but to the theology of Judaism.

(3) When Philo conceives of religion as worship, his aim is to substitute for the old idea of outward ceremonial that of an inward communion of the soul with God. He tries to show how by spiritual discipline and with the aid of divine grace the soul may be freed from all earthly entanglements and attain to its true life. Worship, therefore, as he describes it, is in the last resort a condition of ecstasy, in which the human spirit becomes one with the divine. All intermediate beings, even the Logos itself, are only guides and supports in the upward journey of the soul, until it arrives directly and by its own right at the vision of God. In our Epistle we find nothing of this mysticism which constitutes the very essence of Philo's thought. The idea of worship is accepted literally, and is set forth under the forms and imagery of the ancient ceremonial.

It is assumed, as in the Jewish ritual system, that the chief hindrance to man's approach to God is sin, and that means must be provided for removing it by a due purification. It is assumed, likewise, that the offices of a priest are necessary, and on this need of a Mediator between man and God the whole argument turns. No doubt the thought is always present that mere ceremonial religion is now a thing of the past. The true worship is impossible without an inward regeneration—a "cleansing of the conscience from dead works." But this ultimate significance of ritual worship is never wholly separated from the ritual itself. Christianity is presented not as a communion with God made possible by an inward condition, but as a "perfecting"—the completion on a higher level of the worship offered in the Tabernacle.

(4) As the Epistle is untouched by the Philonic mysticism, so it holds aloof from the cosmical theories which play an essential part in Philo's thinking. A passing reference is made, in the introductory sentences, to the creative activity of the Son; but this line of speculation is not pursued any further. A place has to be made for it, in deference to the Logos doctrine as generally understood, but the writer makes no attempt to work it into his own theology. He takes his stand on the simple Hebraic conception that "He who made all things is God," [1] and this truth is so self-evident to him that he makes the acceptance of it the elementary

[1] He 3^4.

test of faith.[1] He is quite untroubled by the problem which weighs continually on Philo of how the transcendent God can enter into relation to the material world. In so far as he avails himself of the Logos theory it is not to solve this problem but to ensure that Christ shall be so exalted above all created beings that his work will have an absolute value. From beginning to end his interest is solely in this work of Christ as our Redeemer and High Priest, and he leaves cosmical speculations entirely to one side.

So far, then, from merely reproducing the thought of Philo, our Epistle breaks away from it at precisely the most vital points. The divergences are so marked that a question might almost arise as to whether the Hellenistic strain which undoubtedly runs through the Epistle is derived from Alexandria at all. It has to be remembered that Philonism was only one of many attempts on the part of Jewish thinkers to ally their ancestral faith with the results of Greek philosophy, and we must allow for the possibility that the author of Hebrews was dependent on some other school of thought which had grown up in the Dispersion. But a hypothesis of this kind is not necessary, for in any case the Hellenistic ideas which leaven the Epistle are vague and general in their nature. They do not seem to be taken over directly from any formal system, and in the search for their origin we do not need to look outside

[1] He 11^3.

of that Alexandrian movement which was now active within the church. Paul himself, whom no one would think of claiming as a disciple of Philo, shows a certain acquaintance with Philonic conceptions. They must have found an entrance at an early date into Christian theology, perhaps through the agency of Alexandrian converts like Apollos, and would be accepted the more readily as they were a product of Hellenistic thought on its distinctively Jewish side. The teaching of Hebrews may therefore be described as Alexandrian in so far as it reaches back at least indirectly to Philo. It is the work, moreover, of a writer who was in some respects intellectually akin to Philo, and who was attached, like him, to the Greek idealism which had become a common possession of the age. But it cannot be made out that he was indebted to Alexandria for more than a few broad suggestions, which he borrowed at second hand and elaborated to new issues in the light of his own thinking.

From the Alexandrian influence we pass to another of a wholly different character—the influence of primitive Christianity. On the assumption that Paul was the one authoritative teacher of the early church, and that the later theology, in all its variations, must somehow be traced back to him, not a few of the scholars who most fully recognise the non-Pauline character of the Epistle have thought it necessary to relate it, in one form or another, to Paulinism. But the truth

appears to be that instead of resting on Paul it goes back quite independently to that earlier Christianity out of which Paulinism itself had sprung. We have here a fact of primary importance for the understanding not only of the Epistle, but of the whole development of the Christian mission.

In the course of the following chapters we shall have occasion to consider in detail the various indications of a primitive strain in the theology of Hebrews ; and for our present purpose it will be enough to mark their general nature. They serve to bear out the conclusion, which is supported by other evidences, that the earlier tradition was not superseded by Paulinism. In some respects the author of Hebrews, notwithstanding his later date and his philosophical sympathies, stands closer to the original Apostles than he does to Paul.

(1) He adheres to the primitive conception of the new religion as indissolubly bound up with Judaism. His whole argument, as we shall see, rests on the belief that there has been no break in the history of God's people. The old covenant has found its completion in the new—the history of Israel has been perpetuated and consummated in the church. Now this idea of the church as the true Israel which has inherited the promises made to the fathers is, in a broad sense, common to all types of early Christian teaching ; but in Paul it is construed from a spiritual point of view. The believers are Abraham's seed inasmuch as they participate in his faith, and their life in Christ is based on a principle

and governed by a power of which the old system had known nothing. With all his anxiety to claim for the church the rights and prerogatives which had hitherto attached to Judaism, Paul is conscious of the profound originality of the new religion and never fails to throw this aspect of it into the forefront. But in Hebrews the connection between Christianity and Judaism is still conceived literally. The racial bond is no longer insisted on, but the church as a world-wide community is still supposed to be one with Israel. The ministry of Christ is contrasted with that of the high priest, not as something different in kind, but as the reality of which it was the anticipation. The faith which Christians are required to exercise is placed in the same category with that of the Bible heroes, who are held up as its examples and forerunners. This idea of the solidarity of the people of God throughout the whole long history that had begun with Abraham and will end with the Parousia, is fundamental to the Epistle. It explains, and in some measure justifies, the traditional title " to the Hebrews."

(2) The teaching of the Epistle is set in the framework of those apocalyptic beliefs which were so ardently cherished in the primitive community. It is regarded as certain that the Parousia is close at hand, that men are living on the confines of the new age. The thought of the imminence of the Judgment is put forward as the supreme motive to fidelity and steadfastness. The devil is the tyrant whose power of enslaving men has at

last been broken. The people of God are citizens of a new Jerusalem, which is the home of angels and beatified spirits. All this belongs to the primitive tradition, and in Hebrews there is no attempt, as in the Fourth Gospel and to some attempt in Paul, to interpret the apocalyptic ideas in a purely religious sense. They are combined, as we shall see, with ideas of a different order, more congenial to the Hellenistic mind, but in such a manner that they never lose their original character. For this thinker of the later age, as for the first Apostles, they remain the necessary groundwork of all Christian hopes and beliefs.

(3) It has often been remarked that the earthly life of Jesus has a larger place in our Epistle than in any New Testament book outside of the Gospels. The writer does not, like Paul, regard the earthly life as a mere interlude, of no significance apart from the death in which it culminated, but ascribes to it a moral and religious value of its own. His definite references to the history are indeed few, but the thought of Jesus, who knew our human weaknesses and was tempted as we are, and set us the grand example of obedience and courage and faith, is constantly before his mind. Whence did he derive this interest in the actual life of Jesus, which is all the more striking as he is occupied, in the main, with a speculative theory? When we consider how completely the historical figure was overlaid in the mind of that later age by theological reflection, it is not unreasonable to conclude that he was in touch with

the earlier tradition which has left us the Synoptic Gospels. Like other thinkers of his time he feels it necessary to construct a doctrine of the Person and work of Jesus; but he has grown up in a community which still cherished the remembrance of the life as it had been lived on earth.

(4) A similar inference may be drawn from the absence of all that might be called sacramental theory. The Lord's Supper is never mentioned. Baptism is alluded to several times, but in a quite formal and incidental fashion. Certainly it would be rash to attribute any deep intention to this reticence. That the writer accepted the estimate of the Sacraments which had now come to be universal in the church can hardly be doubted, and it is not difficult, as we shall see later, to find reasons for the subordinate place they occupy in the Epistle. But when all is said, his attitude is not a little strange. Even though he acquiesced in the prevailing view of the Sacraments it cannot have formed a primary element in his thinking, or it would have found at least some unconscious expression. Is it fanciful to conjecture that he belonged to a circle in which Christianity retained, in some measure, its primitive stamp? The ideas which had interwoven themselves with the simple Christian ordinances in communities more pronouncedly Gentile were here held in check by the earlier tradition.

(5) An evidence of a more definite kind may be discerned in the curious analogies between our Epistle

and the speech attributed to Stephen in the book of Acts. Whatever critical difficulties may surround the speech in Acts, there seems no valid reason to doubt that it belongs to a very early stratum of Christian literature. The author of the book can hardly have invented it, for it lacks precisely those qualities of dramatic fitness and effect which an inventor would have aimed at. On purely linguistic grounds there is strong reason to suppose that it is a translation of an Aramaic document, which Luke, according to his usual method, has incorporated in his narrative. Between this speech and the Epistle to Hebrews there are resemblances so numerous and striking that they can hardly be set down to accident. In both documents the history of Israel is passed under review, with particular emphasis on certain episodes; the typological method is applied to the interpretation of the Old Testament; the idea of worship is made central. There is reference in both to the Rabbinical legends that the Law was given by angels and that the tabernacle was modelled on a heavenly pattern. Above all, the speech and the Epistle have the same fundamental motive, although they develop it in very different ways. Christianity is viewed in the Epistle as the perfecting of a revelation which had been made in many fragments to the fathers, and this is likewise the governing idea of the apparently aimless summary of Old Testament events which occupies the speech of Stephen. Its purpose is to demonstrate that in the rejection of

Christ the Jewish people have been false to their own past history, of which his coming had been the goal and fulfilment.

It is not too bold to conjecture that in the light of this parallel we can not only trace a primitive strain in Hebrews, but can roughly make out the channel by which it has been transmitted. The speech in Acts, although it may not have been uttered by Stephen in so many words, may be accepted as an outline of the general tenor of his teaching. The ideas expressed in it were normative, we may presume, for his followers, who were scattered after his death and continued his work in centres outside of Palestine. Some of these earliest of Gentile-Christian communities would ere long be absorbed in the Pauline mission, but others, we can hardly doubt, would preserve an independent life, and develop their doctrine along the lines marked out for them by their founders. As time went on they would be affected, like other Gentile churches, by the prevailing currents of speculation; but the Christianity for which they stood would bear a stamp of its own. It would maintain its hold on ideas which were uncoloured by Paulinism and had come, through Stephen, as a direct heritage from the church at Jerusalem. The theory here suggested is purely tentative, and has no other basis than the singular agreements between our Epistle and the speech in the book of Acts; but the broad fact appears certain that the teaching of Hebrews is at once primitive and Hellenistic. Many

difficulties are removed if we assume the existence of communities, however they may have arisen, which partook of this twofold character.

The Epistle, then, if we have understood it rightly, is a product not of some variety of Paulinism, but of a separate form of Gentile Christianity—more closely allied than Paulinism with the earlier mission. A question here comes up which is of peculiar interest in view of the modern inquiry into the origins of Christian doctrine. Can we discover any points of contact between the teaching of this Epistle and the ideas which found their characteristic expression in the mystery religions? In answering this question there is one fact which must be borne in mind—a fact which is all-important, although it has been overlooked or wilfully obscured by many recent scholars. The more we examine the so-called mystery speculations the more certain it becomes that they were common, in some form, to all the Hellenistic thinking of the age. They sprang from the commingling of Stoic and Platonic conceptions with Oriental mysticism, and are bound up with the philosophy of Philo no less than with the myths and observances of the cults. In so far as it is affected by Hellenistic influences the Epistle may fairly be said to be tinged with the doctrines which pervaded the very atmosphere of first-century thought. But if by the mystery beliefs we understand something more specific, it must be answered that no trace of them can

be discovered in Hebrews. Terms may occasionally be used which were associated in a special manner with the cults (*e.g.* φωτισμός, μεσίτης), but they are brought into a wholly different context. The Epistle knows nothing of a participation in the divine nature, or of a union with Christ in his death and resurrection. It contains hardly an echo of those mystical and sacramental ideas which are usually supposed to be the clearest evidences of the Oriental type of religion. This may partly be explained by the fact that the writer is concerned with the discussion of one particular doctrine. There may well have been elements in his thought which had no relevance to his immediate purpose, and which he deliberately kept out of sight. But however it may be accounted for, the absence of any apparent link with mystery religion is significant, and throws not a little suspicion on much recent theorising. It has been confidently asserted that the Oriental influence was nothing less than the dominant one in the early communities—that Christianity was essentially a mystery religion, in which Jesus became the divinity of the cult in place of Attis or Mithra or Serapis. But a view like this can only be maintained by ignoring the complex process at work in the new religion, which employed whatever was offered it in the spiritual life of the time as a help to its own development. It came into a world that was astir with different movements—ethical, philosophical, mystical—and with all of these it allied itself, while it still preserved the sense of its unique

character and message. Hence the varieties of Christian teaching which are all represented within the narrow bounds of the New Testament. We may choose to limit ourselves to some one of them, and to describe early Christianity as an apocalyptic hope, or an ethical discipline, or a mystical or speculative philosophy. But our judgment of it is sure to be mistaken unless we take all these phases of its activity together, and allow at the same time for something beyond them—for the life-giving principle which imparted new values to all that was borrowed. The existence of a writing like Hebrews, as genuine an expression of Christian piety as the Pauline Epistles or the Fourth Gospel and yet so entirely different, is sufficient proof of this many-sidedness of New Testament religion. It supplies a warning which must never be forgotten when we are tempted to define the whole life of the primitive church in the terms of one narrow formula.

The problem, therefore, of determining the exact place of our Epistle becomes the more intricate the more we examine it. On the one hand, the writer seems to attach himself, more directly than Paul, to the original Christian tradition. On the other hand, he is manifestly influenced by those Alexandrian ideas which we have learned to associate with the latest development of New Testament theology. He is related at once to the community which waited at Jerusalem for the coming of the Lord, and to the Catholic church

which in the century following found its spokesmen in the Apologists and Irenæus. Not only in its teaching as a whole does the Epistle present this double aspect, but at every point it reveals the interaction of diverse currents of thought. The ideas which it borrows from Alexandria are blended with others derived from the Rabbinical schools, and these again appear to have come down in some special tradition in which they had acquired a new significance.

The Epistle, however, cannot be wholly explained by the most exhaustive inquiry into the influences which have gone to mould it, for its writer was not merely a man of culture, with a mind hospitable to suggestions from many different sides, but a thinker of highly individual temperament. All that he derives, from whatever source, he brings into the service of a new conception of Christianity—remarkable for its boldness and its genuine insight. To understand this conception we must look more closely into his own religious attitude as it comes out in the Epistle. In what mood and with what prepossessions did he approach the gospel? How had it made its appeal to him as the final revelation in which all others had been perfected? These are the questions to which we must find an answer before we can interpret his teaching in detail.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND.

To a modern reader the argument of Hebrews is obscure and unconvincing. Not only does it employ a method of proof which appears to us artificial, but it starts from assumptions which are never clearly stated and are often hard to determine. In order to do justice to the writer's thought it is necessary to consider these presuppositions, which are given him partly by the general beliefs of his time, partly by the Christian tradition, partly by his individual outlook and cast of mind. Our task will be simplified if we first make a brief survey of the argument itself.

It takes the form of a comparison of the old and new covenants, with the object of proving that the earlier relation of God to His people was only the prelude and foreshadowing of that higher relation which has now been realised through Christ. Three characteristics which marked the dignity of the old covenant are examined one by one, and in each case it is shown that Christ has perfected what was at best inferior and preparatory. In the first place, the Law, according to the familiar Jewish tradition, was given through

angels; but Christ, as the Son of God, stood infinitely higher than the angels. Again, the Law had been inaugurated by Moses, the most faithful and venerable of all God's servants. But Christ, as the Son, had a place in God's household far above that of any servant. He spoke and acted with an authority to which Moses could lay no claim. Once more, the Law made provision for a high priest, who held office by divine appointment, and ministered in a sanctuary framed on the pattern of the sanctuary in heaven. But Christ was a Priest belonging to a higher order, and the place of his ministry is no other than the heavenly sanctuary itself. It is this third point of the comparison with which the Epistle is mainly occupied; indeed, the earlier chapters are little more than introductory to the central theme of the great High Priest, who is the mediator of a better covenant. First, it is shown that Jesus, though standing in no official succession, was a Priest—no other than the ideal Priest who was foretold by scripture in the dark allusion to "a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." The nature of the ministry which Christ exercises is then considered in detail, and is contrasted point by point with that of the levitical high priest. As the high priest entered into the holy place once a year to restore the relation between God and His people, so Jesus passed through the veil which separates the visible world from the invisible. As the high priest offered sacrifice to purify from sin the people whom he represented, so Jesus

made his sacrifice. It consisted in nothing else than the offering of his own body; and this sacrifice, incalculably more in value than the slaughtered beasts of the ancient ritual, effected a far higher kind of consecration. Men were cleansed by it from no mere ceremonial defilement, but from the inward impurity which kept them distant from God. Moreover, the holy place that Jesus entered was the heavenly sanctuary, of which the earthly one was but a copy; and he entered it not for a brief interval year by year, after sacrifices that had constantly to be renewed, but once for all, to abide for ever at God's right hand. By the priesthood of Christ, therefore, the purpose of which the old covenant fell short has been fully realised. God's people have been brought near to Him, and the access they have thus obtained through the great High Priest can never henceforth be interrupted. The writer now passes from the purely theological argument to a consideration of its practical consequences. He shows that the Christian life, resting as it does on the assurance of a new relation to God, must be one of faith. In all ages, faith has been the power that has supported God's people and led them forward. Amidst the difficulties of the present and the illusions of this passing world they have laid hold on something beyond, and were so enabled to bear up and conquer. And this faith of which they gave us the example, has become ours in far higher measure, since the eternal world into which Christ has entered as our forerunner

is no longer remote from us. We can feel that already we are numbered among its citizens. We can look to the unseen and heavenly things as if they were present realities. Hence the obligation that is laid on us to prove ourselves worthy of our great calling, and to resist all temptation to fall away.

Such, in brief outline, is the purport of the Epistle, and there can be no denying the grandeur and the permanent value of its main conceptions. But it is equally apparent that the author has arrived at them by methods which are foreign to our world of thought. He works with categories which we cannot but regard as unmeaning and fantastic unless we make allowance for the assumptions that lie behind them.

(1) In the first place, the word of scripture is accepted as infallible. Several times the particular authors of Old Testament passages are mentioned by name, and inferences are drawn from the period and circumstances in which they wrote. But the human agents are viewed as the mere instruments of the Holy Spirit, which had declared through them the eternal counsels of God. The testimony of scripture is thus of absolute value. It can be brought forward in lieu of a reasoned proof; or rather there can be no valid proof which does not rest on this foundation. Where a modern thinker would start from some axiom of science, or fixed philosophical principle, the writer of Hebrews sets out from scripture. It must be noted, however, that he is safeguarded, by the very faults of his

exegetical method, from the cramping effects of this reliance on a written authority. Preoccupied as he is with the hidden intention of scripture, he tries to pierce through the letter. In the statements of prophets and psalmists he discovers ideas which are quite alien to them, and which have their true source in religious instinct or reflection. But he is himself unconscious of the freedom which he thus secures for his thought. He offers his doctrines, however bold or novel, as the unfolding of the mind of the Spirit, revealed in scripture, and asks our assent to them because of this divine sanction.

(2) In like manner, an ultimate value is attributed to the ordinances of Jewish worship. These also were prescribed by God. He had willed that men should approach Him by means of a particular ritual, and it is not for them to inquire into the why and wherefore. We have here an aspect of the Epistle which has frequently been misunderstood. A modern theologian who sought to interpret the Jewish rites as typical of the work of Christ would feel it necessary to examine them in all their aspects and discover, if possible, their inward motive and import. We naturally assume that the author of Hebrews had likewise reflected on the meaning of the ancient ordinances. For the elucidation of his thought innumerable essays have been written on the origin and purpose of sacrifice, priesthood, rites of sprinkling and purifying. It has been taken for granted that since he makes so much of these things

his secret must needs be sought for somewhere in the dim recesses of primitive religion. But it may be confidently affirmed that for the understanding of Hebrews all this investigation is labour wasted. The author takes his stand simply on the fact that the ordinances in question have been laid down in scripture. God Himself has appointed them, for reasons that lie utterly beyond our knowledge, and all true worship must in some manner conform to the model He has given us. It is true that the symbolic nature of the rites is constantly insisted on, but this does not imply that behind them there is some profound religious idea which they exhibit in a sort of picture and apart from which they have no value. Nothing more is meant than that the rites themselves are only copies. Sacrifice as performed in the tabernacle was the adumbration of a true and final sacrifice. The levitical priesthood was the prelude to a priesthood of a higher order, in which its aim would at last be realised. But the cardinal fact is never questioned that priesthood and sacrifice, however we may conceive them to operate, are the necessary means of obtaining access to God. They are part of the divine arrangement, as we know it from the revelation in scripture, and have therefore to be accepted. They must be valid under the new covenant as under the old, although the type has now been exchanged for the reality. It cannot be denied that by this refusal to look beyond the scriptural enactment the writer condemns his thought, on not a few sides, to a certain

sterility. For illustration of this we have only to compare his doctrine of the death of Christ with that which is offered us by Paul. Both thinkers employ ancient categories which have now in large measure lost their meaning; but Paul is always trying in the light of them to arrive at principles. He cannot satisfy himself until he has considered the Cross in its moral and spiritual significance—until he has brought it into relation to the divine purpose and the eternal needs of men, and his theory, with all its shortcomings, has proved infinitely fruitful. But the writer of Hebrews does not attempt any real interpretation of the death of Christ. Setting out from Old Testament analogies he regards it as a sacrifice, of the same order as the ritual sacrifices but surpassing them in value, inasmuch as the blood of Christ was more precious than that of bulls and goats. He may seem for a moment to fall back on a profounder thought when he dwells on the moral efficacy of the death as "cleansing the conscience from dead works to serve the living God." But even here the moral value is not associated with the divine love and forgiveness that lay hold of us in the sovereign act of Christ. The thought is merely that if ordinary sacrifices could effect a ceremonial cleansing, the sacrifice of the perfect Victim must be more far-reaching in its results. It must somehow have brought about that real purification of which the levitical cleansing was only a symbol.

(3) Once more, the institutions and doctrines of early Christianity are presupposed, without any endeavour

to explain or vindicate them. "Let us pass on," the writer says, "to perfection—not laying again the foundation of repentance and faith in God and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment." [1] Such beliefs are taken for granted as the given basis of Christian teaching, and all that is necessary now is to advance to the higher truths which are consequent on them. Here we have one of the outstanding differences between Paul and the writer of Hebrews. Paul, in his boldest speculations, is always concerned with the fundamental verities of the Christian faith. His one aim is to understand them more fully, and to connect them with all that is deepest and most certain in human experience. Our Epistle was written at a later date, when the church had agreed to consider the primary beliefs as definitely settled. It was written, too, by one who had little of Paul's impulse towards criticism and introspection, and who rested his faith on what was generally believed. He was anxious, indeed, to discover new possibilities, new reaches of truth, in the message that had come down to him, but only on the condition that the message itself was to stand unchallenged. Again and again he speaks of it by the significant name of the "confession" (ὁμολογία)—implying that there was now a fixed body of doctrine and practice on which all members of the church were agreed. Their duty was to grow in Christian knowledge; but this very demand for progress is based on

[1] He 6^{1}.

the assumption that the great verities are now established, and form a starting-point for a new advance. It would be unjust to say that with Hebrews we have left the creative period of Christian thought behind us. The writer has an originality of his own, and makes a contribution of real and permanent worth. Yet we cannot but see in him the precursor of the later theology, which had its root not so much in the depths of a living experience as in the orthodox confession. He is a reflective thinker of the second or third generation, not a primary Apostle who might say with Paul, " This gospel I received not from men, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." [1]

The Epistle is founded, then, on the threefold assumption of the authority of scripture, the validity of the ritual system, the finality of the " confession " ; and to this extent its argument could appear convincing only to readers of a particular time, who moved in a given circle of traditional ideas. But we cannot do it justice unless we recognise that it has a further basis, not so much in the doctrinal position of the writer as in the intrinsic character of his mind. When all is said he is not a mere scholastic, who rears an imposing structure on dogmas he has never tested, but a religious thinker of a peculiar type, interpreting that aspect of the gospel which has most appealed to him. It is for this reason that he is content to build on so

[1] Gal 1^{12}.

many postulates which belong, as we see them now, to a world of the past. They are true for him not only because they were accepted by his age and society, but because they fell in with his own religious feeling. They afford him a means of explaining to himself what Christianity has been to him in his personal experience. Not a little that might strike us at first sight as fanciful or academical in his reasoning takes a different colour when we appreciate this deeper though unconscious motive at the heart of it.

He is guided, in the first place, by his conception of the ultimate meaning of religion. It is true that he does not set out, as a modern thinker would do, with a formal attempt to define religion, and so proceed to demonstrate the absolute religious worth of Christianity. With abstract analysis of this kind ancient thought did not concern itself. Nevertheless there is everywhere present to his mind a definite idea of what religion means, and by this idea his whole argument is tacitly determined. It is summed up in the phrase which meets us continually in the Epistle—"to draw near to God."

The conception expressed in these words may, in one sense, be said to pervade the whole of the New Testament, as well as this particular writing. Jesus, in his Synoptic teaching, seeks to awaken in men such a confidence in the heavenly Father that they draw near to Him—surrendering themselves, in joyful obedience, to His will. For Paul the one end of religion is fellow-

ship with God, and in the love of Christ, from which nothing can separate us, he finds the assurance of this fellowship. A similar view is set forth in the Johannine writings, although the communion with God is there conceived in a more metaphysical fashion, as a participation in the divine nature. But in Hebrews we hear nothing of fellowship with God, much less of actual union with Him; for it is assumed that God must always remain apart, "the Majesty in the heavens." Our attitude, even when we draw nearest to the throne of grace, cannot be other than one of "reverence and godly fear." The approach to God in which religion consists, is regarded, in this Epistle, as an act of *worship*, and is described in the language of Old Testament ritual. Paul can speak of a "reasonable service"—an inward disposition which has now taken the place of mere ceremonial forms. The Fourth Evangelist declares plainly that the day of visible temples is past, and that the Father desires to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. But the writer of our Epistle still clings to the ancient conception. He recognises the imperfection of the ritual ordinances, but still thinks of them as prefiguring, in some real and literal sense, the true mode of access to God.

It is necessary to look more closely at this pervading idea of Hebrews, that religion consists above all in *worship*. As we meet it in the Old Testament this idea presents itself under two main aspects. On the one hand, it is taken for granted, on the analogy of earthly

kingship, that God is the sovereign Lord, who demands that men should wait upon Him in the attitude of awe and homage. They cannot obtain His benefits unless His majesty is thus acknowledged by the observance of stated ceremonies. But this conception of homage to the divine King is combined with another. The approach to God in a posture of adoration is at the same time the assertion of a privilege. Owning Him as their Lord the worshippers declare themselves His people, who stand in a special relation to Him, and have a right to His protection. The primitive idea of obtaining favour from God by confessing His authority thus merges in that higher conception of worship which comes to its full expression in the Psalms. In the period that succeeded the Exile the whole life of Israel had found its centre in the Temple, and all the deeper sentiments and beliefs which had grown out of the prophetic teaching were now associated with the temple service. Religion is defined by the Psalmists in terms of worship. We are made to realise that in waiting upon God men win for themselves the confidence that they are His people. They become aware that amidst all changes and troubles they have an ever-present help. They attain to a condition of soul in which there is no longer any thought of the benefits they may receive from God, since the approach to Him is itself the fulness of life and joy.

The writer of Hebrews sets out from this Old Testament conception of religion as worship. But where

the Old Testament simply accepts the fact that in the approach to God we obtain the supreme blessing, he connects this fact with another, which to his mind explains it. By drawing near to God as His people we draw near, at the same time, to the heavenly world. Our lives are no longer bound up with the visible and changing things, but are firmly anchored to the eternal realities. These two ideas of access to God and access to the higher world are everywhere united in the Epistle, and are both included in the conception of worship. To come into God's presence is to pass through the veil —to rise out of the sphere of change and illusion and find our true home among the things that cannot be shaken. From this it follows that worship does not consist in certain acts of homage, performed at stated intervals, but in the abiding condition of those whom God has accepted as His people. As Paul conceived of the Christian life as an uninterrupted fellowship with God in Christ, so this writer thinks of it as a continual act of worship. Through our great High Priest we have been enabled to draw near to God, and by so doing to identify ourselves with the higher world. Worship has its sign and outcome in that spirit of faith whereby we apprehend the things not seen.

The idea of religion as worship is inseparable, therefore, from another, which is likewise inherent in the writer's thought. He proceeds on the assumption that over against this world there is an invisible world, and that the earthly things are only types and symbols of

their originals in heaven. This symbolism is not worked out in detail except in the case of the ritual institutions, but there are clear evidences that it has a far wider implication. "This creation" [1] in its whole extent is opposed to a higher order of uncreated being. A day is anticipated when all that has been made will disappear, and the eternal things alone will remain. To understand the contrast which is definitely drawn between the ritual ordinances and their antitypes, we must regard it as merely an aspect of this larger contrast. The tabernacle with its rites is symbolical, because all things that belong to this world have their counterparts in a heavenly world.

This symbolism which underlies all the thought of the Epistle will concern us later in many different connections; and it will be enough, at this stage, to form some idea of its general character. For the writer of Hebrews the earthly things are of the nature of shadows, but they are not on that account worthless and deceptive. He thinks of them, rather, as typifying the heavenly things in the same manner as a sketch or outline represents the finished work. They serve by their very defects to point us beyond themselves to something in which their meaning and purpose are fully realised. Hence the word which is ever recurring in the Epistle, and which, more than any other, expresses its central idea, τελείωσις, "perfecting." This word, like so many others in the Greek of the first century,

[1] He 9^{11}.

is coloured by philosophical usage, and reminds us of the τέλος or ideal end which is implicit, according to Aristotle, in each individual thing. But the philosophical suggestion must not be unduly pressed. The word as employed in Hebrews appears to bear its ordinary sense of a completion, a bringing to full maturity. A distinction is made between a lower phase of existence in which all is tentative and rudimentary, and a higher one, in which the anticipation has grown to fulfilment. Thus Christ is the "perfect" High Priest, inasmuch as he finally accomplishes what the levitical priests have done partially. He ministers in the "perfect" tabernacle, where the service offered in earthly temples is carried to its consummation. He has "perfected" God's people, by bringing them into a relation to God such as they could only surmise under the old covenant. So in the diverse applications of this word we can always trace the general idea of a realisation—a completing of something that has been begun. A certain value is conceded to the earthly things, but it consists not in what they are, but in what they suggest and promise. By their very defects they speak to us of a world of perfection, in which the "shadows of things to come" will give place to "the very image of the things." [1]

Christianity, therefore, is set forth in Hebrews as the religion of attainment. It has given us access to a higher world, and has enabled us to apprehend the

[1] He 10^{1}.

realities which we have hitherto known in their earthly copies. This is the thought which pervades the Epistle and gives meaning to much that at first sight may appear arbitrary and obscure. When all allowance is made for the historical conditions under which the writer worked, and which determined the character of his argument, we have to recognise that the ultimate key to his teaching must be sought in the constitution of his own mind. He was one of those thinkers who are possessed with the sense of a world beyond—a world of true existence of which all visible things are but the signs and reflections. His place, in many respects, is not so much with the Apostles of the faith as with the great idealists; and in the light of this idealism which lies behind it we have to understand his interpretation of the Christian message.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW COVENANT.

The central doctrine of Hebrews is that of the priesthood of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, but the approach to this doctrine lies through another. Christianity, for the author of the Epistle, is the New Covenant whereby God has brought His people into a relation to Himself far closer than was possible hitherto. Christ is the mediator of this new covenant. As it was formerly the office of the high priest to enter into the holy place on behalf of his brethren, so the greater High Priest has appeared for us in the presence of God, to consecrate us as His people.

The idea of the New Covenant belonged to the earliest stratum of Christian thought, and was derived, according to our records, from Jesus himself. We read in Mark's Gospel that at the Supper he described the cup as "my blood of the covenant poured out for many," and the narrative in 1 Corinthians refers more explicitly to "the *new* covenant in my blood."[1] Paul evidently sees in the words of Jesus a reminiscence of the great prediction in the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah. The prophet

[1] Mk 14^{24}, 1 Co 11^{25}.

has foretold a day when God would make a new covenant with His people, and Jesus, on the eve of his death, thought of himself as pouring out the sacrificial blood in which this new covenant would be sealed. It is impossible here to discuss the complex and difficult question as to the authentic words employed by Jesus in the institution of the Supper. The records which have come down to us all show important differences from each other, and in the primitive text of Luke there seems to have been no reference to the Covenant idea. But we cannot, on these grounds, discard it as a later addition. The formula which connects the Supper with the Covenant, however it may have originated, runs back to a time when the meaning of the ordinance was still self-evident, and words not literally spoken by Jesus may yet have been true to his intention. There are not a few indications in the Gospels that he regarded his approaching death as the means whereby the Kingdom, whose advent he had proclaimed, would come into being; and the grandest and most spiritual of all the Old Testament anticipations of the Kingdom was that of Jeremiah: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Jacob and the house of Israel: I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." [1] It was inevitable that Jesus' thought of the coming Kingdom should have been

[1] Jer 31^{31-33}.

influenced by this central passage of prophecy. We can well believe that it was present to his mind at the Last Supper, when he sought to impress on his disciples the significance of his death.

Whatever may have been the attitude of Jesus himself, there can be no doubt that his followers, almost from the first, associated his message with the prophecy of the New Covenant. Assured that he would presently return to inaugurate the Kingdom of God, they thought of themselves as the elect community which would inherit it. They grounded their claim on the definite promise of scripture that in the last days God would choose for Himself a new Israel, with whom He would make another and better covenant.

Here we touch on a conception which was fundamental to early Christian thought, and which needs to be considered more carefully. If there is one thing certain about the primitive church it is that it did not, at the outset, contemplate a breach with Judaism. It came forward, on the contrary, as the faithful remnant in which the history of Israel had found its consummation. Ever since the time of Abraham, God had chosen Israel as His people, and had been seeking to mould it into a holy community; but the mass of the nation had proved intractable. It had been reserved for the church to represent Israel in its ideal character and vocation. The promises which God had made to the fathers were to reach fulfilment in this community, which had responded to the call of the Messiah, and had

thus approved itself to be the true Israel—the genuine core of the elect race.

After the breach with Judaism this idea, while it was still preserved, began to throw off its merely racial significance. The church continued to think of itself as the true Israel, but understood this name in a spiritual sense, and emphasised the contrast between its doctrines and beliefs and those of the parent religion. Hitherto it had construed the prophecy of the New Covenant in its literal meaning, and sought by means of it to assert itself as the true representative of Judaism. Now it employed it in order to vindicate the break with the national tradition and to enforce its appeal to the Gentile world. Christianity was the religion of the New Covenant, and was therefore justified in shaking off the ancient fetters. It was not a mere renovated Judaism, but stood for a wholly new principle, which had been meant from the beginning to supersede the old. This is the view maintained by Paul, who sets the new and the old covenants in direct opposition. He compares them, in a well-known passage, to Hagar and Sarah—the bondwoman who typifies the "Jerusalem that now is," and the free-woman who corresponds with the Jerusalem above. Elsewhere he contrasts the Old Covenant, as embodied in the Mosaic Law, with the new ministration of the Spirit. He rejoices that the veil which had formerly concealed the true knowledge of God has been taken away, and that he himself has been called to proclaim this higher dispensation.

The promise of the New Covenant is thus dissociated from its historical meaning, and is brought into the service of the anti-Jewish movement. On the strength of it the believers assert their right to form a second community, divinely chosen like the first but altogether distinct from it, and endowed with far higher privileges.

As we pass to the consideration of the idea as it appears in Hebrews, we are faced by a preliminary question, which in recent years has perhaps been surrounded with needless difficulty. What is the precise meaning of the word διαθήκη—translated in our English version as "covenant"? The Old Testament term of which it is the equivalent seems originally to have carried with it the suggestion of a contract or mutual agreement. In the earlier stages of Hebrew religion it seemed natural to conceive of the relation of God and man as resting on a contract, similar to that which defines the obligations of man to man. Abraham and Jacob are described as entering into covenants with God—undertaking to render Him due service on condition that He, on His part, would grant them His protection. In the account of the giving of the Law it is assumed that Israel became the people of God on the basis of an agreement, to which both parties were solemnly bound. But this idea of mutual obligation belonged by its nature to a primitive mode of thinking, and gradually disappeared as religious sentiment was refined and developed. The prophets and psalmists

know nothing of a formal contract. For them God does not bargain with His servants, but simply declares His sovereign will and commands that they should obey it. The traditional term "covenant" is still employed, but it has come to possess a new import. It denotes not a two-sided agreement, but a decree or ordinance which is laid down by God, and is accepted without question by His people.

The Greek translators of the Old Testament apparently found a difficulty in rendering a word which had so changed its meaning in the later stage of its history. In order to mitigate the idea of contract, and at the same time leave room for it, they fixed on the colourless word διαθήκη, which implied an arrangement or "disposition" of any sort whatever. But the word thus chosen on account of its vagueness was already in process of being restricted, in common usage, to one particular kind of arrangement, and in the current Greek of the first century had come to be the accepted term for a "will." A problem thus arises as to the exact significance which it bore to the New Testament writers. They make use of the word on which their Greek Bible had stamped a religious value, but the ideas attached to it in their ordinary language persist in intruding themselves. The conception of the divine "covenant" is blended with that of a "will." Thus Paul, when he discusses the covenant in Galatians, falls back on the analogy of a human testament, to which nothing can be added when its provisions have

been once laid down.[1] The writer of our Epistle, by a similar association of ideas, argues that the death of Christ was necessary to the making of the new covenant, since a will does not come into operation until the testator has died.[2] In view of such passages it has been maintained by some modern scholars that the New Testament everywhere construes the word διαθήκη in the sense of a "will." They hold, for example, that in the formula ascribed to him at the Supper Jesus offered the solemn ordinance, with all that it implied, as his "testament," his dying bequest to his followers. But this interpretation, attractive as it may appear at first sight, cannot be seriously defended. There can be little question that in the passages where the idea of a "will" is present we have to do with a conscious play on words, by which the main thought is modified or supplemented. The writers are familiar with the sense in which the Old Testament speaks of the covenant made with Israel, and do not dream of changing it, although they make a passing concession to the phraseology of their own day. It is the scriptural teaching which is always present to their minds when they apply the covenant idea to the work of Christ.

In our Epistle, therefore, as in all the writings of the early church, the New Covenant is the new spiritual order—the new declaration of the divine will. Long ago, at the beginning of their history, God had taken

[1] Gal 3^{15}. [2] He 9^{16}.

Israel for His people, and had laid down the conditions on which they must maintain their relation to Him. This covenant had remained in force through all the past ages, but now it had been superseded by another. God had determined to raise His people to a higher level of privilege, and had imposed on them a new mode of service, corresponding to this higher status. The first covenant, as the prophets had themselves acknowledged, was only provisional. It brought Israel into a relation to God which was not yet the true and final one, and something more was needed before they could be in very deed His people. The writer aims at proving that Christianity is this new covenant, which has at last replaced the old. He compares it point by point with the religion of the Tabernacle, and shows that in all respects it has meant a fulfilment.

The idea thus far is that which meets us everywhere in the early literature, but it is characteristic of Hebrews that the two covenants are related in the closest manner to one another. For Paul, as we have seen, they were simply two religions, differing in their fundamental principles, and this Pauline view has usually been accepted as valid also for our Epistle. It has been taken for granted that the writer's object is to contrast Judaism with Christianity—the lower with the higher religion. But we obscure the whole tenor of his argument when we thus regard him as placing them in direct contrast. He assumes throughout that there is only one religion, divinely instituted, which has now

attained to its consummation. The old covenant, depending on the Mosaic system, was the prelude to another which is far superior, but which is yet linked to the first, and cannot be understood apart from it. As a consequence of the mistaken theory that it was addressed to Jewish Christians who were in danger of relapsing, the Epistle has commonly been read as a polemic, in which Paul's criticism of the Law is reinforced from a different side. But it cannot be urged too strongly, that no such polemical purpose is contemplated. On the contrary, we are made to realise in every chapter that Christianity is bound up with Judaism, as its goal and completion. The "house" over which Moses presided as a servant is that which Christ now rules as the Son. The saints of the Old Testament were the vanguard of the army of faith, and already looked to Christ as their great Captain. The Sabbath rest into which believers are to enter was promised of old to Israel, and is waiting for the children because the fathers had missed it. So the writer is never weary of insisting that there has been no break in the succession, no transference of God's favour to another community. The New Covenant was foreshadowed in the old, and has only perfected the relation which has always existed between God and His people.

In one respect, however, the writer shares the outlook of Paul. He thinks of the covenant as established not merely with the Jewish nation, but with a spiritual

Israel, in which the faithful of all races are included. It is not maintained in so many words that in the new community there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free,—but this removal of the former barriers is clearly implied in numerous passages which belong to the very substance of the Epistle. Christ, we are told, "tasted death for every man," has brought "many sons unto glory," has become "the Author of salvation to all that obey him." "The law of a carnal commandment," which made physical descent the one test of religious privilege, has now given place to a higher law. If the distinction of Jew and Gentile is never once mentioned in the Epistle, it is not, as has sometimes been argued, because the writer moves wholly within the limits of Jewish Christianity, but because he has altogether escaped from them. He has accepted in its full extent the position for which Paul had contended. The universal character of the church has become so self-evident to him that he deems it unnecessary to assert it in so many words. None the less, he still holds to the belief that the church, made up of converts out of all races and set completely free from the ancient law, is one with the historical Israel. At the cost of inner consistency the Pauline view of the church as a universal spiritual community is combined with the primitive conception of it as the faithful remnant of the Jewish nation. All restrictions have been done away, descent from Abraham has ceased to count for anything, the

confession of Christ has taken the place of the Law. But it is still assumed that the continuity in the life of God's people has never been broken, and that the church inherits the promises in virtue of its relation to Israel.

From this point of view, then, we have to understand the idea of the New Covenant as it meets us in the Epistle. There is no intention of disparaging the claims of Judaism in order to restore the fidelity of Jewish Christians who had not forsaken the ancient paths without misgiving. On the contrary, it is taken for granted that past and present are bound up together. Israel is the people of God's choice, and it is still to Israel that He offers His redemption. In old days He had made a covenant with it which was imperfect and preparatory, and now, in the fulness of the time, He has made another, whereby Israel has become in a higher sense His people. We have here the ultimate reason why the argument takes the form of a comparison of the Christian order with that of the Old Testament. Believing that the two covenants are linked together, as two successive phases in the working out of God's purpose, the author feels it necessary to examine them in their mutual relation. What was the meaning of the ancient ordinances? In what respects had they fallen short of their aim? How did they serve to interpret, by way of symbol and prelude, the work of the great High Priest? The nature of the New Cove-

nant is demonstrated in the light of this contrast with the covenant which had preceded it.

We are not to read Hebrews, therefore, as an attempt to justify the breach of Christianity with Judaism. That the new is also the better covenant is, indeed, the very theme of the Epistle; but while insisting on the inadequacy of the old covenant the writer is equally concerned to prove that it had a genuine value. It was only the anticipation, and has now given way to the fulfilment; nevertheless it was of divine origin, and in its own measure achieved the divine purpose. It enabled men in at least an outward, ceremonial manner to draw near to God, and so prefigured the real approach to Him through Christ. By this presentation of the two covenants as differing from each other in degree rather than in kind, we are led to a conception of our religion which, in some respects, is nobler and more satisfying than that of Paul. The new revelation, as this writer thinks of it, was nothing but an unfolding and perfecting. All the faith and worship of the past ages have come at last to their fruition; Jesus is the supreme leader, not only of those who call themselves by his name, but of all who have sought, under whatever imperfect forms, to obtain the vision of God. This is the thought which underlies that view of the relation of the two covenants which pervades the Epistle. It may justly be regarded as the first and in many ways the most splendid protest against all efforts to separate Christianity from the larger spiritual movement, and

by thus insulating to narrow and impoverish it. Yet it is impossible to overlook the limitations which are the necessary consequence of this idea of Christianity as merely the perfecting of the old covenant. For one thing, there is little recognition of the message of Christ as a new quickening power, which has radically changed all human thought and action. With all his reverence for it, the writer seems to conceive of it as little more than a reformed Judaism, depending on the same ritual motives as the old religion, however heightened and purified. We miss the magnificent freshness and ardour of Paul, filled as he is with the conviction that "old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." Moreover, the work of Christ, as set forth in the Epistle, is emptied, in great measure, of its real significance. It has to be equated, as far as possible, with the ancient ordinances. Since Christ took up and completed the previous covenant, he must be considered as a priest, and his work for man's redemption must all be brought under the formal categories of priesthood. It is indeed affirmed that he was the ideal High Priest, whose ministry is enacted not on earth, but in a heavenly sanctuary; but with all its impressiveness and its many profound suggestions, the doctrine is lacking in vitality. We cannot but feel that the whole idea of priesthood is part and parcel of a bygone phase of religion. It has no true application to the work of Christ, and obscures not a few aspects of it which belong to its very essence.

Christianity is represented, then, as the New Covenant, which has perfected the former one by changing its types and forecasts into realities. As thus stated, however, the writer's thought lies open to a possible misunderstanding. It might seem at times as if he simply identified the old covenant with the Mosaic law, and set the New Covenant over against it as the completion and purifying of the law. This, as is well known, was a conception that grew in favour towards the end of the first century, and exercised a powerful influence on the later development of the church. It was maintained that Christ had put an end to the Law in the sense that he had replaced it by another, in which it was carried to higher issues. The moral demands he had advanced, the beliefs he had originated, were statutory in their nature, like the Mosaic ordinances; but they were held to constitute a New Law, answering more fully to the divine requirements. Now it may safely be affirmed that our Epistle shows no trace of this conception. It never describes the Christian teaching as an elaboration of that which had been given under the old order. It does not concern itself at all with the commandments which Jesus had laid down, but only with the fact that he was our High Priest in things pertaining to God. When he is contrasted with Moses the whole emphasis is laid on his personal dignity, as a Son in that household of God in which Moses was a servant.

Indeed, when we look more closely into the writer's

thought we discover that the covenant means to him something altogether different from the Law. It consisted not in the ordinances which God had imposed on Israel, but in the relation to Himself of which these ordinances were the pledge and safeguard. From beginning to end of the Epistle no mention is made of circumcision or the keeping of the Sabbath or the dietary rules, although these, as the writer well knew, were the main provisions of the Law. His interest is not in the Law itself, but in the object for which it existed. It was designed to secure for Israel the right of access to God, and all else is therefore regarded as subordinate to the cultus, and more particularly to the priesthood. "In connection with this," it is expressly stated, "the Law was given."[1] The whole legal structure had its keystone in the priesthood, and fell bodily to the ground when the old priesthood gave way to another. Not only so, but the priestly ordinances themselves were centred in the definite act of the entrance of the high priest into the holy of holies on the day of Atonement. This was the ultimate reason for the entire Mosaic system, for in this solemn act, repeated yearly by its official representative, Israel declared itself to be God's people. For the writer of Hebrews the Law as such is nothing but out-work or scaffolding. He is concerned with that relation subsisting between God and Israel which lay behind the Law, and for the protection of which the Law had been

[1] He 7^{11}.

devised. His attention is focused on the two priestly acts—the high priest's intercession in the holy place, and that of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary. By the comparison of these two acts he seeks to determine the nature of the two covenants.

Here, then, we arrive at the cardinal theme of the Epistle. In a former time God had made a covenant with Israel, choosing this nation out of all others as His people ; but as yet it was only in a qualified sense that He bestowed this privilege. On the one hand, the sacrifices ordained by the ancient system had no intrinsic value, and at best could bring the worshippers into a state of mere ceremonial purity. The sins which kept them separate from God were not yet removed. On the other hand, the tabernacle in which Israel sought access to God was an earthly and material one—a type and suggestion of God's true dwelling-place. The worship rendered in this visible sanctuary could only be provisional, and those who shared in it did not in reality stand before God. Now, however, there has been instituted a New Covenant, whereby the shadows and anticipations have passed into fulfilment. In the death of Christ a sacrifice has been offered which secures a real forgiveness of sin, and has thus broken down the barriers that kept men distant from God. Moreover, Christ who was the sacrifice was at the same time the High Priest, belonging to a new and higher order, who ministers in no earthly sanctuary, but in the eternal sanctuary in heaven. Through him we pass beyond

the sphere of visible things and have access to the very presence of God.

In Christianity, therefore, the writer of Hebrews finds the ultimate explanation of the great prophecy—"they shall be my people, and I will be their God." It had been God's purpose from the beginning that Israel should be His people, with the right of immediate access to Him; but under the first covenant this purpose had only been realised in part. A time was to come when those whom God had called would be raised to the height of their vocation, and would become in very truth God's people. By his work as our High Priest Jesus has obtained for us this privilege, and has so inaugurated the final religion. There can be no higher relation between God and man than that of the New Covenant, which ensures that all sins are forgiven, and that we enter, through the veil, into the divine presence.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO AGES AND THE TWO WORLDS.

The earliest and the latest phases of New Testament thought are both reflected in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It perpetuates the tradition which had come down from the first Apostles, and connects it at the same time with speculative ideas, which had their origin in Greek philosophy. The difficulties of the Epistle are due, in great measure, to the mingling of these two entirely different strains, not only in its particular doctrines, but in its conception of Christianity as a whole.

The teaching of Jesus, it is now generally recognised, attached itself to the apocalyptic beliefs which had long been current among the Jewish people, and which had received a new impulse from the work of John the Baptist. Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God, the new age in which God would assert His sovereignty, was close at hand. He declared that he would himself return as Messiah to inaugurate this new age, and meanwhile gathered around him a body of disciples, as the nucleus of the elect community, which would inherit it. From the vague indications afforded us in the

Gospels it would seem that he accepted his death as the means ordained by God for exalting him to his Messianic office, and preparing the way for the Kingdom. These apocalyptic ideas which had formed the framework of the ethical and religious teaching of Jesus were taken over by the primitive church, and were further elaborated in their bearing on the Cross and Resurrection. It was believed that Jesus had died for our sins, that he had risen as the Messiah, that in a little while he would return in glory and judge the world, bestowing eternal life on his people; that the present order would then be dissolved and would give place to another, a Kingdom of God, a new and better age, in which the will of God would absolutely prevail. Thus the piety of the early church was all determined by the hope of the great future which would commence with the glorious return of Jesus as the Messiah. The believers thought of themselves as the destined heirs of that coming Kingdom of God, although they were still involved for a brief interval in the evils of the present age.

Now when we turn to our Epistle we cannot but recognise that its thought continues to move within the circle of these apocalyptic hopes. The conception of the two ages, on which the primitive gospel rested, is fundamental also to the Epistle. It is assumed that the world's history falls into two great periods, of which the first is on the point of closing. The Christian message has come to men " in these last days "—at the

very end of the first period—and presently God will shake heaven and earth, to break up the existing order and establish the new one in its stead. Only a little time remains, the interval that is still called "to-day," [1] during which an opportunity is given to hear the divine warning and repent. This imminence of the great change is insisted on, ever and again, in the hortatory passages of the Epistle. "The Coming One will come and will not tarry," [2] and Christians may well be patient, since their deliverance is near. In the knowledge that erelong they will share in the consummation, they are to bear up bravely against their momentary troubles. Although the world contemns them, they are to think proudly of the destiny to which they are called. They are also to be filled with a solemn sense of responsibility, knowing that they must shortly give account before the supreme Judge. We have already had occasion to note the conjecture that a definite expectation is in the writer's mind when he makes emphatic reference to the forty years which Israel had spent in the wilderness. It has been argued that Israel in the wilderness is typical for him of the Christian church in its pilgrimage on earth, and that from this analogy he forecasts the period that must elapse before the final deliverance. If the Epistle could be dated as early as 70 or 75 A.D. this intention might fairly be read into his words. His warnings would be vastly more impressive if he could point to a clear indication from scripture that the

[1] He 3^{13}. [2] 10^{37}.

earthly sojourn of the church was now at the very point of completion. But the Epistle belongs, almost certainly, to a later date, when any anticipations that may have been based on the forty years had already proved mistaken. We must be content to regard the allusion as accidental, with only a general bearing on the idea of the approaching end.

The Epistle, then, takes up the primitive hope, and looks forward to the return of Christ as the grand event which will mark the transition from the present to the coming age. As he once appeared on earth to make a sacrifice for sin, so he will appear a second time for the salvation of his people. The Parousia is conceived as a literal and visible coming, but the dramatic detail with which it is invested in the earlier teaching is noticeably absent. Nothing is said of the attendant throngs of angels, or of the sudden revelation of the Messiah amidst the clouds of heaven. The Judgment is connected not with Christ, but with God Himself, and its nature is left indefinite. Its terrors are darkly hinted at as all the more dreadful because we cannot picture them, and can only think of "a certain fearful prospect of fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries."[1] Sometimes it might appear as if the conception of a future judgment is blended, as in the Fourth Gospel, with that of a Judgment always in process, through the operation of the word of God, which is living and powerful and searches the inmost purposes of the

[1] He 10^{27}.

heart. There is a similar endeavour to preserve the apocalyptic scheme without insisting on its details in the one allusion to the tyranny exercised by the devil. According to the primitive teaching the present age is ruled by the powers of darkness, confederated under one great leader, whose dethronement will mark the beginning of the reign of God. To this belief we have many references in the New Testament, and in the book of Revelation it occupies a place of cardinal importance. The writer of Hebrews feels it necessary to take account of it, but he only does so incidentally, and in such a manner as to invest it with a new meaning. Christ by his death has destroyed "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil." The casting down of Satan from his usurped authority as prince of this world is taken for granted as a fixed element in the apocalyptic hope; but our attention is at once turned from the event itself to its consequences for man's moral life. Satan had ruled the world because he wielded the power of death, and by this threat suspended over men he had kept them in subjection. His fall had secured their deliverance. They had been set free not so much from an outward tyrant as from the fears which had weighed on their minds continually, and made their condition one of bondage.

In one respect, however, the apocalyptic ideas are accepted in their most definite and realistic form. Jewish speculation, in its effort to magnify the institutions of the national religion, had advanced the theory

that they were modelled on heavenly patterns. Corresponding with the holy city on earth there was a Jerusalem above. The temple had its counterpart in a Temple that stood for all eternity in heaven. The stated ritual was only the earthly copy of the service which was rendered by angels in the immediate presence of God. This theory had been taken up by the apocalyptic writers, and had been woven into their anticipations of the last days. It was believed that when the reign of God had set in the copies would be merged in the realities—either on a renovated earth or in the heavenly world which would henceforth be the abode of the redeemed community. From our Christian book of Revelation we are familiar with the conceptions which play their part in apocalyptic literature as a whole. We read of the worship offered before the throne of God by saints and angels, of a glorious city into which nothing false or impure may enter. In his vision of the final consummation the seer beholds this new Jerusalem descending from heaven and taking the place of the earthly city. Paul likewise contrasts the Jerusalem on earth, bound up with the temporary institutions of the Law, and the Jerusalem above, which is the mother of the true Israel. But the idea which Paul merely touches on, as an element in a conscious allegory, has a central significance for the writer of Hebrews. He thinks of the heirs of the new covenant as incorporated with the assembly of saints and angels whose names are enrolled in heaven. Belonging, as

they do, to the heavenly city, they have their part in the eternal realities of which the visible things are only the shadows. Above all, they draw near to God through the ministry which is exercised by the ideal High Priest in the true sanctuary, and which therefore accomplishes in very deed all that was typified in the ancient ritual. This conception of the heavenly priesthood is linked, as we shall presently see, with ideas of a different order, and we search in vain, in the existing apocalyptic books, for any exact parallel to it. None the less it belongs unmistakably to the same world of thought as the kindred conceptions of the heavenly temple and the New Jerusalem.

The teaching of Hebrews is thus set in the framework of the apocalyptic tradition. It presupposes that whole body of doctrine concerning the two ages, the Parousia, the general resurrection, the holy community, the heavenly city, with which the primitive church had associated its gospel. In accordance with this apocalyptic outlook it repeatedly describes the Christian message as a *hope*. The salvation offered by Christ is so certain that we may speak of it in the language of possession, but it is still something that awaits us in the future. Our lot is cast among the visible things, in the world that now is, and we reach forward to that which is beyond. The day approaches when Christ will come a second time for the deliverance of his people. Their part is to endure patiently until that day, and meanwhile to anchor themselves by

hope to that new order of things which is yet to be revealed.

We now turn, however, to the other aspect of the writer's thought. Side by side with the beliefs which he takes over from the primitive tradition, he avails himself of certain speculative ideas, entirely foreign to it in their nature and origin. As a result, he arrives at a new understanding of the gospel, which has only a formal relation to the apocalyptic scheme.

(1) On the one hand, the traditional conception of the two ages is displaced by another, which may be described as that of the two worlds. In the earlier teaching, the great consummation is always regarded under the category of *time*. Amidst the wrongs and imperfections of the present the believer looks forward to a new period about to open, when God will at last assert His sovereignty and all existing conditions will be changed. The whole emphasis is thrown on this contrast of present and future—so much so that we are left uncertain whether the new order will be realised on this earth or in some higher sphere. To this conception of a glorious future the writer of Hebrews outwardly remains faithful. He looks for the day when Christ will return in power, and dwells on the hope which consoles and uplifts us during the interval of waiting. But while he thus attaches himself to the primitive belief, he, so to speak, transposes it out of the categories of time into those of place. The new age,

as he conceives it, will be only the manifestation of something which already exists in heaven, and he is concerned not so much with the manifestation as with the intrinsic character of the new order. He is aware of a heavenly world over against the earthly, and instead of looking forward he looks upward to that higher realm of perfection. Compare, for example, his idea of the New Jerusalem with that which meets us in the book of Revelation. In the Apocalypse, as in the Epistle, the heavenly city is pictured as already in being—the eternal counterpart of the city on earth. But the seer is occupied wholly with the coming day when it will be manifest, and all nations will flow into it, and sin and darkness will vanish in its light. The holy city becomes little more than a visible embodiment of that new age which is in store for God's people. In Hebrews, on the other hand, the New Jerusalem represents the unseen and eternal, in contrast with the things "that can be touched"—the lower, material things.[1] Our minds are directed not so much to its revelation in the future as to its existence now, over against this changing world wherein we dwell. As the people of Christ we have part in the true worship, offered in no earthly tabernacle, but in the eternal sanctuary where God Himself is present. We can lift ourselves out of the sphere of types and shadows and become citizens even now of that "city which hath foundations." This substitution of the higher world for the future age is

[1] He 12^{18}.

one of the characteristic features of the Epistle, and modifies its whole view of Christianity. The faith of the earlier church was directed to the Parousia, when Christ would deliver his people and bring in the Kingdom; but in Hebrews the hope of the Parousia takes a quite secondary place. The one truth which is ever kept before us is that Christ has passed through the veil into the heavenly world and has thus secured for us an immediate access to God. It is true that the writer accepts the hope of the Parousia, and relies on it constantly for pressing home his exhortations. He does not try, like the Fourth Evangelist, to explain it in a purely spiritual sense, as the Lord's return to his disciples in the secrecy of mystical fellowship. But this thought of the Parousia is interwoven with another and more vital one, which may be said to render it superfluous. We are told, almost in the same breath, that our High Priest abides for ever in the heavenly sanctuary, and that he will come a second time unto salvation. But why should he thus come again? He has already saved his people by entering the holy place on their behalf. He enters it never to depart, and it is this very fact, as we are assured in emphatic language, which gives his work an eternal efficacy. We have no choice but to acknowledge that in the writer's essential thought there is no room for the hope of the Parousia. He clings to it earnestly, for it is intensely real to his own mind, as well as an integral part of the sacred tradition. Nevertheless, he has

unconsciously broken with it. The doctrine of the two ages, on which it depends, has nothing to do with his own conception of the earthly and heavenly worlds.

Not only does the Parousia lose its original significance, but the whole emphasis is shifted from a salvation in the future to one that is effected here and now. It is true that much is made of the "better hope" given us in Christianity—of the inheritance laid up for us—of promises which have not yet been fulfilled and which we may forfeit by unbelief. The writer accepts the earlier beliefs without a question, and is careful to express himself in the apocalyptic language current in the church. But all the time a different conception of the Christian salvation is present to his mind. Ever since the new religion had come in contact with Gentile thought, the idea of a deliverance in the future had been felt to be inadequate, and this feeling had become more acute as the hoped-for Parousia was delayed. Paul, while he looks forward to the glory that shall be revealed, thinks also of a present redemption, consequent on the work of the Spirit and on the union of the believer with Christ. In the Fourth Gospel the eternal life which had formerly been anticipated as the peculiar blessing of the new age becomes a life into which we are born again even now in the act of faith. The writer of Hebrews does not fall back, like Paul and John, on the Hellenistic mysticism, yet he seeks, as they do, to transport the gift of salvation from the future into the

present. He conceives of Christ as now ascended on our behalf into the heavenly world, and interceding for us at the right hand of God. Through him we can lay hold, in the midst of our earthly struggle, of the real and abiding things. In every time of need we can rely on the grace of God to help us. We have been gathered to the general assembly of the first-born, and are enrolled along with them as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. Thus the believer participates already in that higher life which was reserved, according to the apocalyptic view, for the coming age. Salvation is still described, in the terms which had become consecrated for Christian piety, as a future possession; but these traditional terms no longer correspond with the writer's fundamental thought. His faith is directed not to the new age, but to the invisible world, in which all earthly types have their ideal counterparts and to which we have a present access through the new and living way opened up for us by Christ.

There is one passage, indeed, in which the idea of a future salvation may appear, at first sight, to be accepted without reserve.[1] The passage forms a somewhat loose and awkward digression, and may possibly be a separate discourse which has been incorporated, for a hortatory object, with the main argument. Its purpose is to show that the "rest" of which the Psalmist had spoken was not a mere earthly repose in the land of Canaan, but the Sabbath rest of God. A share in this "rest"

[1] He 4^{1-11}.

had been promised by God to His people, and since ancient Israel had missed the promise through unbelief it still remains open. The true Israel, the community which God has called through Christ and has set apart for Himself, may look forward to the Sabbath rest. Here, then, the writer seems to be directly occupied with the idea of a great future which will set in with the Parousia, comparing it, as was common in the early teaching, with the promised land into which Israel had entered. But when we look more closely into the passage we find that here also the primitive idea, while formally retained, is dissolved into something different. The whole emphasis is thrown on the fact that the "rest" of God has always existed. As soon as He had finished His work of creation God had withdrawn into His eternal Sabbath, and has dwelt in it unceasingly. He desires that men should participate with Him in this Sabbath which crowns all labour, and Israel would long ago have attained to it if they had not failed through disobedience. The apocalyptic idea which seems to dominate the passage is therefore merged in another. Instead of a future blessedness to which the church aspires as the result of Christ's victory, the writer thinks of a blessedness which is offered now. It has been fully realised in that heavenly world where God has His dwelling-place, and the people of God may share in it, if they are faithful to their great calling. The thought of a final consummation, reserved for a new age, is allowed to fall out of sight. From the

foundation of the world the rest has been waiting for men to enter into it, and long ago they might have obtained it. They may possess it to-day, if they hearken to God's voice.

The apocalyptic ideas, as they meet us in Hebrews, have thus been modified in a manner that largely alters their significance. Our attention is transferred from the coming age to the higher world, from the future salvation to the access to God which is offered us in the present. The primitive beliefs are not, indeed, by any means abandoned. For the author of the Epistle they formed an essential element in the Christian confession, and he is careful to preserve them, even when he cannot bring them into harmony with his own characteristic thought. But they are blended in his mind with ideas of a different order, and in his presentation of them we continually feel the influence of these alien ideas. He is a disciple of Alexandria as well as of the primitive church.

The Alexandrian philosophy, as we have already seen, rested on a dualism which ultimately goes back to Plato. It conceives of this visible world as the shadow of a higher reality, and bids us so identify ourselves with the divine principle within us that we may rise above sensual illusion and make our home in the eternal world. Broadly speaking, this is the conception that hovers before the mind of our writer. He also contrasts the heavenly with the earthly, the

changing and temporal with the everlasting. He seeks to inspire us with the faith that can reach out to the invisible things, amidst the transient appearances of this world. But while he combines the Alexandrian strain of thought with the primitive Christian beliefs, we have to take account of certain marked differences between his doctrine of the two worlds and the idealism of Philo.

(1) In the first place, he is concerned almost solely with the question of worship. As he examines the religion of the old covenant, he fixes his attention on the ritual ordinances whereby men had made their approach to God, and contrasts them with the divine originals of which they were an earthly copy. His picture of the heavenly worship must indeed be viewed in its larger setting. There is a higher sanctuary because there is a higher world, in which all visible things attain to their perfection. Ever and again, by a significant word or phrase, we are reminded of this wider conception in the background, and if we leave it out of sight the argument of the Epistle becomes unintelligible. But the idea of a higher world of existence over against the world of sense is never fully worked out as it is in Philo. It serves only as a starting-point for the specific discussion of the true worship.

(2) The divine realities are conceived in a literal and concrete fashion. With Philo they resolve themselves into moral and spiritual abstractions, while in Hebrews they are actual things, corresponding on a

higher plane to their earthly copies. There is a heavenly Jerusalem, a heavenly sanctuary. The priesthood which Christ exercises is the counterpart, in no merely figurative sense, of the levitical priesthood. In Philo we have an idealism of the genuine Platonic type, which ascribes to the intelligible forms of things an existence apart, like that of the plan of a building in the mind of the architect. The writer of Hebrews adopts this metaphysical conception, but interprets it in the light of Jewish typology. He thinks of the realities laid up in the higher world as not merely ideal forms, but as heavenly patterns, such as were revealed to Moses in the Mount.

(3) Throughout the Epistle the religious interest is central. It may be granted that Philo, to a greater extent than has commonly been recognised, is a religious thinker, who is mainly intent on the nature and conditions of the true spiritual worship. But his method is consciously philosophical. He builds up a cosmical theory, on the basis of which he proceeds to consider how man can raise himself above the things of sense and enter into communion with God. The writer of our Epistle does not concern himself with the speculative problems which are involved in the religious view of the world. He starts from the fact that in Christianity we have a new and living way into the presence of God, and the one aim of his thinking is to explain and emphasise this fact. Whatever philosophy may lie behind his argument is strictly sub-

ordinated to the religious and practical purpose. It is futile, therefore, to attempt to bring all his teaching into line with Philonic speculation, for he makes no effort to be philosophically consistent. The doctrine of the two worlds appealed to him as throwing light on certain aspects of the work of Christ, and he uses it as the framework of his teaching. But while he avails himself of the general idea suggested by it, he gives it new applications and works it out in his own peculiar way. By forcing his thought at every point into harmony with the Alexandrian categories we are in danger of missing everything in it that is vital and distinctive.

In the theology of Hebrews, therefore, there are two different strands, corresponding to the two influences that have chiefly contributed to its formation. On the one hand it rests on assumptions which had been taken over by the primitive church from apocalyptic Judaism. A new age is at hand, when the promises of God will all come to fulfilment, and the believers are the destined heirs of this new age. They have become in very deed the people of God, confirmed in their right by a new covenant, and may look forward to the enduring "rest." As yet, however, their religion is a hope—sure and steadfast, but still a hope, which they must maintain unimpaired during the interval that must elapse before its fruition. To these apocalyptic ideas which were given him in the primitive

tradition our author is faithful. He does not try to spiritualise them, and expresses them often with a naïve realism that is scarcely surpassed in the book of Revelation. But along with this element in the Epistle there is another, no less pervading. The doctrine of the two ages is combined with a doctrine of the two worlds—the heavenly and unseen as opposed to the earthly and visible. Christianity is conceived as the means whereby we can identify ourselves even now with the higher world, and so build our lives on a true and lasting foundation. Thus the apocalyptic beliefs are interwoven with others which belong to an order of thought essentially different. The hope for good things to come merges in the faith which lays hold on present though invisible realities. The inheritance which awaits us in the great future is described as already ours, since we have obtained access to the higher world. The thought of the Lord's return to save his people interchanges with that of his perpetual ministry on their behalf in the true sanctuary. From the beginning to the end of the Epistle, we have to deal with this twofold presentation of Christianity. It is set forth at once under the forms of the apocalyptic tradition and from the point of view of what may be called a philosophical idealism.

The writer of Hebrews endeavours to blend together these two strains of thought—the hope of a glorious future which had grown up out of the calamitous history of the Jewish nation, and the doctrine of an ideal world,

which was the final outcome of Greek reflection. While holding to the belief in a new world which will come into being at the Parousia, he conceives of this better world as only the manifestation of that which already exists in heaven and which we can apprehend even now through Christ our forerunner. But with all his skill he cannot disguise the inconsistency of the two modes of thought, and again and again we find them in contradiction. In this respect, as in others, the Epistle bears the marks of its origin in a middle period of theological development. Christianity had sprung in the soil of Judaism, and its message was at first wrapt up in apocalyptic forms which were hardly intelligible to the Gentile mind. So long as it retained them it could make little progress towards its larger destiny; and its chief effort, throughout the first century, was to exchange them for others, to which the mind of the age could more freely adapt itself. This process of transformation has left its record in our New Testament, and in the Fourth Gospel it came to completion. Apocalyptic ideas are there resolved wholly into their purely spiritual equivalents. The Kingdom of God is nothing else than eternal life; the Judgment consists in an inward attraction towards the darkness or the light; the Parousia is no visible, dramatic event, but the return of Christ as an unseen presence to abide with his own. When our Epistle was written the church was striving towards this reinterpretation of the Christian message, but had not yet accomplished

it. The apocalyptic ideas were still a living element in the tradition, and the new conceptions which had filtered in from Hellenistic thought had not grown strong enough to displace them. Our author is content to leave the two presentations side by side. He tries to find room for both of them in a theology which is at once primitive and Hellenistic, and which therefore suffers, in spite of its grandeur and suggestiveness, from a lack of inner harmony.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HIGH-PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST.

THERE can be no question as to the central theme of Hebrews, for the writer himself is careful to mark it out in explicit terms. "Now the crowning point in our discussion is this: We have such an high priest as has sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens—a minister of the holy place, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord set up, and not man." [1] The doctrine which forms the Gnosis of the Epistle, and on which the various lines of its argument are all meant to converge, is here succinctly stated. Christ is our High Priest, and the place of his ministry is the sanctuary in heaven.

Before considering this doctrine in detail it will be well to remind ourselves of the larger conception on which it is grounded. The writer, as we have seen, regards Christianity as the New Covenant. The former covenant had been maintained by the institution of the high priesthood, but the access to God which had thus been secured was an outward and imperfect one, and was intended from the first as the prelude to some-

[1] He $8^{1.2}$.

thing better. By the coming of Christ this New Covenant has at last been established. Under the old conditions the people were represented before God by an official priest, selected from time to time by the accident of birth; but the High Priest now appointed belongs to a superior order, and possesses in very truth those attributes which pertained to the levitical priest by a sort of fiction. He has offered a sacrifice which was something more than a formal purification for sin. His ministry is enacted in no earthly holy place, but in the true sanctuary in heaven. In him the office of priesthood has attained to its ideal character, and has thereby ensured the closer relation between God and man.

Throughout the Epistle, then, the work of Christ is interpreted in terms of priesthood. The New Covenant, as the writer conceives it, is nothing but the old one brought to its completion, and is subject to the same conditions. In seeking to determine what Christ has done for us he takes his guidance from the ordinances laid down in scripture concerning the function of the high priest. Though dealing with an earthly priesthood they were of divine origin, and were meant to illuminate the nature of that higher ministry whereby the true access to God would at last be realised. The main portion of the Epistle is occupied with a comparison of the two priesthoods, in order to prove that Christ has verily accomplished all that was implied and foreshadowed in the levitical service.

This method, it must be acknowledged, is a highly

artificial one. We cannot but feel, as the writer elaborates his analogy, that he is engaged in pouring new wine into old bottles, which are burst under the strain. To discover the meaning of Christianity he falls back on ceremonies and institutions which belonged wholly to the past, and which the new spiritual religion had deliberately set aside. Ever and again he is compelled to leave out the characteristic facts of the gospel while he forces the parallel between the work of Christ and that of the levitical high priest. At the same time there is no need to make his argument more artificial than it really is. Not a few expositors have been willing to regard him as little more than a theological antiquarian, absorbed in the minutiæ of Old Testament ritual, and bent on explaining everything in the light of them. For the elucidation of his thought they have sifted the data of the levitical books, and have insisted on working out his allusions to the worship of the Tabernacle to the last detail. But most of this erudite labour is merely thrown away. The truth is that he has studied his Old Testament material somewhat superficially, and does not aim at any full or exact comparison. In his account of the day of Atonement he makes no reference whatever to such cardinal observances as the liberation of the scapegoat and the touching of the altar with the sacrificial blood. These had no bearing on his particular thesis, and he does not hesitate to leave them wholly out of sight. Indeed the more we examine his argument the more it is impressed on

us that while he appears to reason from the old priesthood to the new, he follows the opposite course. His mind is filled with the conviction that in Christ we have obtained a perfect access to God, and he turns to the ancient ritual in order to discover hints and anticipations of what has now been realised. In the levitical system for its own sake he has no interest. Those aspects of it alone have any significance for him which appear in some way to illustrate the Christian idea.

It is assumed, then, that the priestly institutions were ordained by God for the purpose of guarding the relation between Himself and His people. He required them to be holy as He is holy, and the covenant He had made with them was always liable to interruption because of their sins. It could only be restored by the mediation of the high priest, who had been qualified by divine appointment to act as their intercessor. Year by year on the day of Atonement he offered sacrifice on their behalf; then, with the blood that bore witness to this purification, he entered the sanctuary, and stood for a brief interval in the presence of God. It was this entrance into the holy place that formed the distinctive act of the high priest, all that preceded it being only the means for making it possible. Apart from the sacrifice, which cleansed their sins and restored them to a condition of ritual holiness, the worshippers dared not presume to make their approach to God. But the approach itself consisted in the passing of the high

priest through the veil. It was by this act that he renewed the covenant, and so maintained the right of Israel to appear before God as His chosen people.

In the working out of his analogy the writer lays stress on three features of the Old Testament ritual—the person of the high priest, the sacrifice he offers, his entrance into the sanctuary. The manifold details of the levitical service are allowed to fall out of sight, and our attention is concentrated on these three outstanding facts. In each case, too, the comparison is made to hinge on one Old Testament passage—the 110th Psalm, with its mysterious reference to a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

According to the view now generally accepted this Psalm is of late origin, and is written in praise of one of the kings of the Maccabæan house, who united in his own person the dignities of king and high priest. In this patriot king (perhaps Simon Hyrcanus, whose name, in the opinion of some scholars, is woven acrostically into the Psalm) the poet sees the legendary glories of Jerusalem revived in his own day. Like the Melchizedek of primeval history, his hero is at once a king and a priest. Needless to say, a critical interpretation of this kind is entirely absent from the mind of our writer. The Psalm, as he reads it, is directly Messianic, and its allusion to Melchizedek conveys a hidden meaning which challenges the insight of those who have been spiritually enlightened. The Gnosis of the Epistle consists in the effort to penetrate the

secret import of this passage, and thereby to arrive at a new understanding of the work of Christ.

It is more than probable that Jewish speculation had already concerned itself with the figure of Melchizedek, who came and went like an apparition in the cherished history of Abraham. Theological fancy may have transformed him into an angelic being, or into the Messiah himself. Of such speculations we have no definite traces in the surviving literature, but the writer of Hebrews may have attached himself to a tradition, more or less obscure. But a tradition of this nature, even if we could prove its existence, has little to do with his main thought. His interest is not in the actual Melchizedek, but in the prophetic significance of this dim figure, who is so described in scripture as to typify the Son of God. Nothing is said of his father or mother or descent—of his birth or death. He stands forth as a priest who belonged to no line of succession, but exercised his office by the inherent right of his own personality. He is declared, moreover, to be "a priest for ever," a type of the eternal priest who would arise in the last days. How little the writer is occupied with Melchizedek himself becomes apparent in the sudden transition from the shadowy portrait in Genesis to Christ, as if he alone were in question. "He of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, . . . for it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah."[1] Melchizedek is so much an abstraction, a mere anticipa-

[1] He $7^{13, 14}$.

tion of the coming Priest, that the type dissolves, even as we contemplate it, into the reality.

(1) On the ground, therefore, of the prophetic Psalm it is first shown that Christ, in his own Person, was the true High Priest, of whose ministry the levitical priesthood has been only the prelude and symbol. Whence did the writer derive this conception of Christ as exercising a priestly office? It may be that he came to it by his own reflection, as an inference from the Psalm which had so strongly appealed to him; but this is not likely. There are various indications that the conception was not wholly new in Christian thought. The suggestion of it already existed in Jewish apocalyptic literature, which contained at least one writing—the Testament of Levi—where the Messiah was delineated in the character of a priest. Several times in our New Testament we seem to catch echoes of a similar idea. Paul thinks of the exalted Christ as now making intercession for us. The Fourth Gospel culminates in the great prayer which Jesus, on the eve of his death, offers for his people, after the manner of a priestly mediator. To the seer of Revelation the Lord appears in the double insignia of priest and king;[1] and in 1 Peter we can discern at least the approach to a like conception.[2] It may be inferred from such passages that the idea of priesthood was often employed by Christian thinkers, at least figuratively; and in certain sections of the church it may have been developed more

[1] Rev 1^{13}. [2] 1 P 2^{9}.

fully, and linked to the mysterious intimations of the 110th Psalm. We know that this Psalm was generally accepted as Messianic, and that it had been so construed by Jesus himself. It would be surprising if the writer of Hebrews was the first Christian teacher to draw far-reaching conclusions from its prophecy of the Messianic king who was also to be a "priest for ever." Admitting, however, that he may have attached himself to some earlier speculation, we have no reason to suppose that it afforded him more than a starting-point for the thesis which he elaborates with such skill and originality. He is himself aware that it will impress his readers as novel and not a little perplexing; and for its real source we have no need to grope among the débris of forgotten traditions. It sprang of its own accord out of his primary conception of religion as consisting, above all, in access to God. If religion is essentially worship, and therefore inseparable from priesthood, the mediator of the absolute religion must bear the character of the ideal Priest.

For proof of this we are directed to the familiar Messianic Psalm. In the actual life of Jesus, as the writer himself acknowledges, there was nothing to reveal his priesthood; for he was born outside of the sacred tribe of Levi, and seemed to possess not even the elementary credentials of a priest.[1] But when we turn to the Psalm we perceive the true significance of this fact. Jesus was not a priest in the levitical sense

[1] He 8^4.

because he belonged to a higher order, or rather, constituted an order by himself. At a time when Levi was still unborn there had appeared a priest of unique dignity, whose ministry, as described in scripture, far transcended that of the sons of Aaron. It is this priesthood of Melchizedek which is attributed in the Psalm to Christ. Not only did he stand apart from the tribe and family in which the ordinary priesthood was vested, but he was appointed to be "a priest for ever." The others come and go, exercising their office for a brief season, and with all the limitations which are inherent in its transitory nature. But Christ "holds his priesthood inviolable," uninterrupted by change and death, and there is therefore no restriction on its saving power.[1] In one pregnant sentence the writer sums up the character of the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek which has been bestowed on Christ. It is given, he says, "not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life."[2] In other words, it was not dependent on an arbitrary decree, working through the accident of physical descent, but was inherent in the Priest himself, and continued for ever, since he was exempt from death. As his priesthood is eternal, so it is infinite in its reach and efficacy. "He is able to save to the uttermost those who come unto God through him."

(2) Again, being in his own Person the true High Priest, Christ offered the true sacrifice. Our Epistle

[1] He $7^{24.\ 25}$. [2] 7^{16}.

knows nothing of the Pauline interpretation of the Cross as the destruction of the sinful flesh, and the satisfaction rendered to the claims of the Law. In place of these ideas, derived from Hellenistic or Rabbinical speculation, it employs others, which are based on the analogies of ritual. The purpose of the Old Testament sacrifices, and especially of the great sacrifice on the day of Atonement, was to provide a cleansing, a "sanctification," in virtue of which the worshipper might come without fear into the presence of God. So for Hebrews the death of Christ is the supreme offering, which effects in reality that which the old sacrifices could only effect partially and symbolically. By means of it the believers are "sanctified," and have thus a free access to God, for whom they are no longer separated by sin. The attempt to discover some profound spiritual meaning in this doctrine of the death of Christ is entirely useless. The writer simply takes his stand on the belief, which passed into the Mosaic system from primitive religion, that by sacrifice men were brought into the right condition for worshipping God. No ancient thinker felt it necessary to ask himself why sacrifice should have this effect, or what was the precise nature of the cleansing that resulted from it. It was enough to know that this was the appointed means whereby the proper relation was established between God and those who sought to approach Him. What was assumed to hold true of all sacrifice is transferred, in our Epistle, to the sacrifice of Christ. Far as

it transcends the ancient offerings it is supposed, like them, to aim at a sanctification, on the ground of which the people of God obtain access to God. Such an interpretation, it must be granted, is not to be compared to the Pauline doctrine in religious depth and value. The categories which Paul employs are almost as remote from us as those of the Epistle, but we are conscious everywhere of a real endeavour to apprehend the death of Christ in its moral significance, and to connect it with the grace and love of God. In Hebrews we can discover no such effort to relate it to inward experience. The central fact of the Christian redemption is allowed to rest on no firmer basis than the assumptions of ancient ritual, which were arbitrary from the beginning, and have now become utterly outworn.

But while the writer interprets the death of Christ on the analogy of the Jewish sacrifices, he is never tired of insisting that it stands on a higher plane, and has now finally accomplished what the old rites could only pre-figure. Assuming though he does that they were of divine ordinance, he recognises their insufficiency. "The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins"; it could only serve for the purifying of the flesh, for the imparting of some formal and external holiness. The rites imposed by the Law could effect even this only for the moment, and had to be performed anew year by year. Christ, on the other hand, has made an offering not of slaughtered beasts, but of himself, the noblest and most precious of all sacrifices. In virtue of that

eternal spirit which constituted his nature, he not only suffered as the victim, but passed through death to appear as High Priest in the holy place.[1] The sacrifice did not need to be constantly repeated, but was offered once for all, since in itself it had a worth so incalculable that its efficacy endured for ever. By thus presenting his own body Christ brought to its fulfilment that divine purpose to which all rites of sacrifice had been directed from the first. He could say, "I come to do Thy will, O God"; [1] for sacrifice had been ordained for the sanctifying of God's people, and this had now been realised in no mere ceremonial fashion but in very deed. Men had undergone an inward, spiritual cleansing. In newness of heart, with their conscience purified from dead works, they could feel that they had attained to the true holiness which made it possible for them to approach the living God. Several times in the course of the Epistle the writer comes back to this thought, showing that with all his presuppositions he has broken with ritual ideas, and has grasped the essential purport of Jesus' own teaching. He perceives that the true service is not one of outward forms, but of moral consecration. To possess the will which is in harmony with the divine will, is to draw near to God. But no effort is made to explain how this inward renewal, apart from which there can be no genuine worship, is related to the death of Christ. We have to rest satisfied with the argument that if the old sacrifices effected an

[1] He 9^{14}. [2] 10^{9}.

outward cleansing, then the great sacrifice must be infinitely deeper in its operation, and must purify the heart and will.

(3) But emphasis is laid on a further point in the analogy between the work of Christ and that of the high priest on the day of Atonement. The sacrifice under the Mosaic ritual was only the necessary prelude to the crowning act. Bearing in his hands the sacrificial blood, which attested the due cleansing of the people, the high priest entered the inner shrine and waited for a brief interval in the divine presence. The worshippers whom he represented were thus brought near to God. They were reinstated in the privilege, bestowed on them by the covenant, of calling themselves God's people. With this aspect of the high priest's work the writer arrives, as he himself is careful to mark out, at the κεφάλαιον, the climax to which the whole previous discussion has been leading.[1] "We have an High Priest, a minister of the true sanctuary, which the Lord pitched, and not man." Moses had framed the tabernacle after the pattern of a heavenly Tabernacle, revealed to him on the Mount, and the holy place into which the high priest entered on the day of Atonement was meant to image this other sanctuary, where God has His eternal dwelling-place. It is in the heavenly sanctuary that Christ exercises his office. This is apparent, not only from the prophetic Psalm which described him as sitting at God's right hand, but from

[1] He 8^{1}.

the very fact that he was excluded from an earthly priesthood. For if the prerogative granted to the sons of Levi was withheld from this greater Priest, the reason could only be that he was destined to minister on a far grander scene.[1] He was to pass through the veil that separates the invisible world from the visible, and to appear before God in the eternal sanctuary. Not only so, but he was to enter that heavenly sanctuary to abide there for ever. The earthly high priest remained standing in the divine presence, as one who enjoyed a mere transitory privilege, but the Priest of whom the Psalm was written is to "sit down at God's right hand."[2] His ministry is a perpetual one, and so long as it continues those for whom he ministers have an access to God which cannot be interrupted. They have the assurance at all times that they are God's people, who may come freely to the throne of grace. Thus Christ has achieved in reality that which was only suggested, by type and symbol, in the work of the levitical high priest. Through him the mere shadows of good things to come have been replaced by the very image of the things.[3] He waits as our mediator in the actual presence of God, and has so perfected the relation between God and His people.

In the doctrine of the heavenly priesthood, therefore, the thought which determines the whole argument of the Epistle receives its highest application. Chris-

[1] He 8^{4}. [2] $10^{11.12}$. [3] 10^{1}.

tianity is the ultimate religion because it transforms the ancient symbols into their realities. The worship of the tabernacle had been ordained by God, and the idea expressed in it was eternally true and valid; but it could only adumbrate that idea within the sphere of earthly things. Its high priest was a man burdened with human weakness; its sacrifices were of slight ephemeral value; its holy place was at the best a copy, made with hands. All that it could offer was a reflection, which served to point men to the true worship, but which could not of itself bring them near to God. But now the reflection has given place to the substance. Jesus in his own Person was the ideal High Priest, who made the sacrifice that purified once for all, and ministers for us in the true sanctuary. All that was typified in the old religion has thus been realised, and we have obtained a complete and enduring access to God. The fundamental idea in this whole argument is the same in essence as that which must underlie every attempt to affirm the absolute claim of Christianity. If our religion is indeed the final and all-sufficing one we must have some guarantee that it lifts us out of the domain of half-truths into that of reality. Symbols, however apt and beautiful, are at last outworn, and men are compelled to part with them, in the unceasing effort to lay hold of the "very image of the things." It is one of our writer's chief services to religious thought that he has so clearly drawn the distinction between type and reality—a distinction which

must be recognised before any spiritual form of worship is possible. But the weakness of his argument consists in this—that while he shows the inadequacy of the old ritual conceptions, he never definitely escapes from them. He cannot rid himself of the belief that the substance must in some manner be of the same nature as the type. The true worship must conform to that of the tabernacle, with the difference that it is offered in heaven instead of on earth, and has therefore a higher validity.

This limitation of the writer's thought needs to be frankly recognised. He has failed to understand, as Paul did, the essential newness of Christianity, and assimilates it to Judaism, even while he aims at proving its superiority. Those "old things which have passed away"—priesthood, sacrifice, ceremonial—are still regarded by him as permanent elements in religion, and he takes for granted that in the work of Christ they have only been "perfected." They have been lifted out of a lower to a higher plane, on which the type becomes one with the thing typified. There can be no question that he thinks of the heavenly ministry in a literal and concrete fashion, as the counterpart of the ministry prescribed by the levitical ordinances. Christ, in no merely figurative sense, is a High Priest, who offered a sacrifice corresponding to the ancient sacrifices, though of greater worth, and then passed into a sanctuary which has a local existence in the heavenly world. The whole argument hinges on the theory that the old institutions, appointed as they

had been by God, are copies in earthly material of divine originals. Nevertheless, it is a superficial reading of the Epistle which finds in it nothing but the Christian application of a fantastic doctrine which had grown up out of Jewish ritual. The writer, indeed, accepts the doctrine, but seeks by means of it to convey certain convictions of his own as to the nature of Christianity.

It must always be remembered, on the one hand, that he is an Alexandrian as well as a Jewish thinker. While he accepts the theory that the heavenly things are the counterparts of the sacred possessions of Judaism, it connects itself, in his mind, with the Platonic conception of a higher order of being, which gives meaning and purpose to the visible order. On earth we have only the dim reflections of the ideal forms, and the end of all our striving is to apprehend the perfect through the imperfect, the truth through the shadow. On the face of it, the Epistle is concerned wholly with the ordinances of Jewish worship, and their fulfilment in Christianity, but the further idea is always present that through this New Covenant we have been brought into vital relation with the eternal world. We grasp in their reality those things which we have hitherto known in their mere earthly suggestions. To understand the full scope of the doctrine of the heavenly priesthood of Christ, we must take account of this speculative theory in the background. Christ is the great High Priest, inasmuch

as he has entered on our behalf into the world of true existence. He enables us, amidst the change and illusion of this life, to lay hold of the invisible certainties. This conception is not worked out deliberately, as it has been by later thinkers who have sought to combine the Christian teaching with some form of idealism. None the less, the writer of Hebrews is the pioneer of that philosophical Christianity which in all times has attracted to its service many of the noblest minds of the church. He tries to associate our religion with the belief in an intelligible world. In Christ he sees the Mediator through whom that world becomes real to us—the High Priest who maintains our access to it, in spite of the obscuring veil.

But along with this speculative idea we can discern a purely religious one, which in one aspect or another must ever belong to the very substance of Christianity. When all is said, the doctrine of the Epistle, fanciful as it now appears to us, has grown out of a genuine Christian experience. The writer is conscious, like Paul and the early Apostles, that through Christ we have been brought near to God. Men have learned through him that they are God's people, that their sins have been forgiven, that they can now come boldly before the throne of grace. It is from this fact of a new relation to God which has been made possible by Christ that our author sets out, and he falls back on the ancient ritual in order to explain it

to himself more fully. His explanation is that Christ was a Priest, in another and higher sense than the priest of the Old Covenant. He was in very deed that which they typified, and by a sacrifice of absolute worth has won for us the right of access to God's presence. Now it may be granted that the conception of priesthood which is thus applied to the work of Christ is a wholly inadequate one, and was bound up with ideas and superstitions which belonged to the past. But, whatever may have been its origin and history, it carried a profound meaning at the heart of it, and we owe it to the writer of Hebrews that this has been rescued, and has been given its due place in our Christian thought. In the priestly ritual men confessed their need of a Mediator. Conscious that they could not of themselves obtain that access to God which was necessary to their true life, they sought to approach Him through a consecrated agent, who was supposed to stand nearer to His presence. In our Epistle this idea of priesthood, which had grown up in ancient times out of a deep-seated instinct, is divested of its grosser elements. It is shown that while the ritual observances, which "stood on meats and drinks and divers washings," have now been done away, all that they ultimately meant has survived in a purer form. We can obtain through a Mediator what we could never win for ourselves. Conscious as we are of alienation, we have our Priest and our availing sacrifice, and can draw near with boldness to the throne

of grace. It is not a little significant that this Epistle, more perhaps than any other New Testament writing, has moulded the language of our prayers and hymns. In their actual approach to God, men have been constrained to fall back on its conception of the High Priest who offered up himself and makes intercession for them in the heavenly temple. It is not difficult to point out the inconsistencies of this conception, and to show that it has its roots in the crude surmises of primitive religion. But the fact remains that the spirit of Christian devotion in all ages has found a truth in it to which it has responded. Against the criticisms which may be justly urged from the side of theology we must set this vindication which it has secured in the living worship of the church.

The author himself seems to be aware that his interpretation is not wholly adequate, and seeks repeatedly to bring it to a deeper issue. He thinks of the true purification as consisting not in a ceremonial holiness, but in a cleansing of the conscience from dead works. He dwells on the idea of the higher sanctuary in order to make vivid to our minds the worth of that eternal Priesthood through which we have immediate access to God. Thus while he moves within the limits prescribed for him by ancient ritual beliefs, he draws his inspiration from the teaching of the gospel. For the mode of thinking which would identify worship with stated observances he is seeking, unawares to himself, to substitute another, which conceives of it as nothing

else than the knowledge and the service of the living God. Again and again, as he describes the new religion in the traditional terms of sanctuary and sacrifice, he falls little short of anticipating the great declaration of the Fourth Gospel—"God is a Spirit, and those who worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NATURE OF CHRIST.

Perhaps the most difficult problems of the Epistle to the Hebrews are those which concern its Christological doctrine. From beginning to end a supreme significance is attributed to Jesus, our Mediator and High Priest; but as soon as we inquire why his work should have this surpassing value, we encounter questions which are apparently left unanswered. We seem to be thrown back sometimes on the ideas of the Synoptic Gospels, sometimes on those of Jewish Messianic theory; while in not a few passages we feel ourselves transported into the world of second-century speculation and of the later creeds. Almost all the conceptions that have emerged from time to time in the history of Christological controversy find their place in Hebrews, along with others that are peculiar to the Epistle itself. Moreover, they are not blended in any consistent picture. The whole argument rests on the assertion of the absolute worth of Christ, but no effort is made to vindicate this assertion by a reasoned doctrine of his Person.

We must be careful, however, not to judge the writer's Christology from a point of view which was entirely

foreign to him. From the Council of Nicæa onwards the question of the Person of Christ has been regarded as paramount, and the different churches have all maintained that faith is impossible until it has been correctly answered. It has bulked so largely in our religious thinking that we cannot approach the New Testament without certain prepossessions. We assume that for those early teachers, as for their successors, a doctrine of Christ's Person must have formed the starting-point, and in this belief we read a far-reaching significance into every stray hint and conjecture. But it is forgotten that for the New Testament writers the problems which forced themselves on the theology of a later age had not yet emerged. The early church was filled with the consciousness of what Christ had done—of the salvation he had brought and the fellowship with God which men had obtained through him. It thought of this work of Christ, attested as it was by the living experience of believers, as the essential fact of Christianity, and troubled itself little about the abstract considerations that were bound up with it. As the giver of a new life and a new revelation, Jesus must have stood in some unique relation to God; this was fully recognised by the primitive teachers. But they did not conceive it necessary to define this relation in metaphysical terms. They were satisfied with categories, vague at the best and borrowed from a variety of sources, which enabled them to attribute a supreme dignity to Jesus. They employed those cate-

gories loosely, and passed over from one of them to another, without observing or caring whether they were mutually consistent. So long as Christ was accepted, with a vital faith, as Lord and Saviour, it seemed to matter little how the mystery of his Person should be explained, and men were left free to speculate on it as they pleased. The questions that arose in later controversy were indeed implicit from the first, and were bound, in course of time, to press forward for a solution. But at the outset the enthusiastic faith in Jesus was its own evidence. It was not till the following age, when the initial ardour had partly spent itself, that it was felt necessary to justify this faith by theological reflection.

The Epistle to the Hebrews has come to us from that first period, when the mind of the church was still preoccupied with the redeeming work of Christ. According as one aspect or another of his work was emphasised, his Person was viewed under different categories, but it was not yet the subject of separate investigation. Conceptions that varied widely from each other were allowed to stand side by side, and were all accepted as equally valid, since they all contributed something to the understanding of his work. The confusion of doctrine became still greater as the church entered on the period of transition, when Jewish forms of thought were gradually displaced by others, derived from Gentile speculation. Hitherto it had been enough to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, and the Messianic

conception was so loose and elastic that many diverse doctrines could find shelter under it, while still preserving the semblance of unity. But as the Gentile mission proceeded it became necessary to define the Messianic belief in terms of Hellenistic thought, with the result that the latent inconsistencies sprang to light. Jesus was at once the Deliverer foretold in Old Testament prophecy, and the heavenly being of the Apocalypses. He was also the enlightener, the redeemer from sin and death, the self-manifestation of God and His agent in the government of the world. We cannot be surprised that the author of Hebrews, writing in a time when the transition was still in process, is unable to offer any uniform doctrine. His thought, like that of the other New Testament writers, moves on several different planes, and in his case the resulting diversity is all the more marked as he brings the two extremes of early Christianity so abruptly together. In his account of the Person of Christ, as in his theology generally, he links himself on the one hand with the primitive apocalyptic hopes, and on the other with Alexandrian speculation.

The Epistle is dominated, as we have seen, by the conception of the priesthood of Christ; and from this point of view its doctrine of his Person must be considered. It is assumed, on the ground of the Mosaic ordinances, that priesthood attaches to certain men by virtue of their birth and origin, and that the claim of

the great High Priest must run back to a similar qualification. Like the sons of Aaron, but in a far higher degree, he must exercise his office as a matter of birthright. He cannot have entered on it by mere choice or merit of his own, but must have been destined to it by some prerogative that belonged to his very nature.[1] In so far, then, as the writer considers the Person of Christ, his object is to prove that Jesus, who was sprung from no hereditary line of priests, was yet a priest by divine right. The nature of his Person is discussed not so much for its own sake as in its bearing on his office.

Two qualifications are singled out as requisite for a genuine high priest. He must be fully identified with those whom he represents—in sympathy with their desires and needs because he himself has felt them—and at the same time he must stand in a special relation to God, so as to come confidently into His presence.[2] The high priest under the old covenant was duly possessed of this twofold qualification. He could act on behalf of his brethren since he was himself a man, sharing in all human wants and infirmities. He had also the right of approach to God, for he owed his office to no presumption of his own, but to the divine appointment which had fallen upon him as the successor by lineal descent of Aaron. How was it, in those two respects, with the High Priest of the new covenant? The writer aims at showing—and from this point of

[1] He 5^{14}. [2] $5^{1.2}$.

view we must understand his whole Christology—that if the levitical high priest had both the necessary titles to his office, the high priest under the new covenant possessed them in far greater measure. They were united in him in such a manner that he gave an absolute fulfilment to the idea of priesthood.

(1) On the one hand, if Christ is our High Priest he must be so identified with men that he can truly represent them before God. He exercises his ministry not on behalf of angelic beings, but on behalf of men, and it cannot avail for us unless he has made our cause his own by living our life and sharing in our weaknesses and temptations. "He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one"—members together of the same family of mankind.[1] One of the most striking features of the Epistle is the prominence which is everywhere assigned to the human character of Jesus. Though insisting no less than Paul on the glory of the exalted Lord, the writer is so far from "refusing to know Christ after the flesh" that he puts the earthly life into the foreground. He consistently uses the personal name "Jesus." He thinks of the sojourn on earth as not merely a temporary eclipse and humiliation, but as the indispensable prelude to the heavenly life. In virtue of his human struggle, Jesus became the Son of God in a fuller and richer sense than before, and thus attained to a more excellent glory. For the most part the earthly life is described in large outlines which mark out its

[1] He 2^{11}.

pervading character rather than its definite events. We are reminded of the trials and opposition which Jesus encountered, of his faith and courage and obedience, of the mercy and helpfulness which he manifested while he dwelt with men. No words of his teaching are quoted, although there is a passing reference to the gospel as proclaimed by him and transmitted to his Apostles.[1] In the few instances where particular facts of the history are mentioned they are connected wholly with the closing episodes of his earthly career. He is set before us as praying to God on the eve of his death with strong crying and tears [2]—as suffering patiently the contradiction of sinners [3]—as dying on the Cross, outside of the city gates.[4] But this neglect of the rich detail of the Gospel history is not due to ignorance or unconcern, but to deliberate purpose. While we realise the humanity of Jesus we are not to forget that he who became one with us was nevertheless the Son of God. This is the side of his nature on which our minds are to be chiefly concentrated, and care is taken that it should not be overshadowed by recollections of the earthly Teacher. A time was to come when Jesus as he lived was invested with the divine attributes, and could be presented, in the Fourth Gospel, as at once a man and a heavenly being. But the writer of Hebrews is still too closely in contact with the remembered facts. He cannot but feel, like Paul, that the knowledge of Jesus after the flesh interposes a barrier against the

[1] He 2^{3}. [2] 5^{7}. [3] 12^{3}. [4] 13^{12}.

truer knowledge of him in his exalted life. He therefore contemplates the history from a certain distance, recalling to us by a few significant touches the one fact which matters—that Jesus, our High Priest, was in all points like unto his brethren.

It has been contended by some modern critics that this emphasis on the human character of Jesus has a purely theological motive. They argue that the writer is concerned with the Gospel history only in so far as it supports his thesis that Jesus was a High Priest, a true mediator between God and man. The historical facts, according to this view, are completely subordinated to the doctrine. But we may well ask how a writer who has nothing but a theological interest in the life of Jesus has yet seized, with an unfailing instinct, on just those elements in it which have most appealed to the hearts of men. Not only so, but his allusions, however indefinite, are conveyed in words of exquisite feeling, which have embalmed themselves in the language of Christian devotion to this day. Whatever may have been his doctrinal motive, it is abundantly clear that he is moved by the story of Jesus for its own sake, and would have us respond to it as he has himself done. Again and again he breaks away from his immediate argument, and bids us turn our eyes to the great example. "Let us run the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." "Let us go out to him outside the gate, bearing his reproach." "He was tempted at all points like as we are." The reference to Gethsemane occurs,

it is true, in a theological context, as a proof that Jesus, who shrank from his sacrifice, had his office of High Priest imposed on him, and did not merely arrogate it to himself; but this somewhat frigid reflection at once merges in another, that through his agony he attained to a perfect submission to the will of God. "Though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things that he suffered."[1] To explain the writer's interest in the earthly life as a mere afterthought, consequent on his theory of priesthood, is to shroud the whole message of his Epistle in a mist of theological pedantry. It would be nearer the mark to regard his theory as the outcome, in no small measure, of his contemplation of the life. He had discerned the profound import of that actual history which other thinkers had neglected, and sought for some interpretation that would do justice to the work of Christ in both its aspects. This interpretation he found in his doctrine of priesthood. By making himself one with us, and sharing our trials and infirmities, Jesus perfected himself for his destined office of our merciful and faithful High Priest.

Avoiding, as it does, all problems of a metaphysical nature, the Epistle does not concern itself with the mode and conditions of the Incarnation. It assumes that Jesus was born, apparently in the ordinary course of generation, from the tribe of Judah,[2] and that he was man in a full and real sense, though without sin. But

[1] He 5^{8}. [2] 7^{14}.

his earthly life is described, at the same time, as nothing but an interlude in a larger, heavenly life. No attempt is made to reconcile these two conceptions, apart from the suggestion which is thrown out in the perplexing words " through an eternal Spirit." [1] They would seem to imply that in Jesus, man though he was on the physical side of his nature, there yet dwelt a Spirit which was exempt from the normal limitations of mortality. It had constituted his being before his entrance into this world, and was not affected by his death ; and in virtue of it he passed from the Cross to the sanctuary in heaven, acting in his own person the double part of Victim and Priest. The same idea seems to underlie another difficult phrase which speaks of Jesus as appointed to his office " according to the power of an indissoluble life." [2] Here again the thought appears to be that he was " a priest for ever " because his earthly career was only an episode in a higher existence, which had suffered no real interruption. He became man in order to fulfil the purpose he had declared in heaven, " Behold I come to do Thy will, O God " ; and the life on earth was thus continuous with the pre-existent life, and brought it to a fuller realisation.[3] On the other hand, it was bound up with the exalted life which followed it. The death in which it culminated was the sacrifice offered by the High Priest to secure His entrance into the holy place, and was not so much a break between two states of being as the link

[1] He 9^{14}. [2] 7^{16}. [3] 10^{5-9}.

that united them with one another. This idea of an "indissoluble life," inwardly the same through all changes, is expressed, with a somewhat different emphasis, in the passage, "we see Jesus, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, that he, by the grace of God, might taste death for every man." [1] The verse is a well-known crux in New Testament exegesis, and its difficulty consists precisely in its effort to assert, in the strongest possible manner, the inseparable connection of the earthly life with the subsequent elevation. Jesus was crowned because he suffered, and his suffering avails for all men and expresses a divine purpose, because he has thus been crowned. The humiliation to which he submitted "for a little time" was only a stage in his ascent to sovereign honour, and his death cannot be viewed apart from the glory that followed it. From first to last he was fulfilling the great redemptive work which God had planned.

It is here, most probably, that we must seek the true explanation of one of the strangest omissions in the Epistle. For Paul, as for the primitive Apostles, the very corner-stone of all Christian teaching was the message of the Resurrection. "If Christ be not risen, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." [2] Amidst all the new developments of later Christian thought the Resurrection still holds its place as central, and the writer of Hebrews himself, when he falls back, in his

[1] He 2^{9}. [2] 1 Co 15^{17}.

closing benediction, on the most cherished elements of the common faith, commends his readers to "Him who brought from the dead that great Shepherd of the sheep."[1] But it is here alone that he makes even a passing allusion to this primary Christian belief. How are we to account for his silence? It cannot be due, we may be sure, to any questioning of the belief, or to any disposition to construe it in a purely spiritual sense. We may conclude, rather, that he kept it in the background because it would have broken the impression which he seeks everywhere to convey of the continuity of the earthly with the heavenly life of Jesus. For the church at large the Resurrection signified that Jesus, by a miraculous act of God, had been raised to a second life, different in all its conditions from the first. There had been a mysterious interval which had divided the sojourn on earth from the state of glory, and the Christian imagination had begun already to busy itself with this dark space in the career of Jesus, when he had died but had not yet ascended to his Father. But for our writer, whatever may have been his theory of the Resurrection, there was no such interval. He seems to conceive of Jesus as passing immediately from his earthly to his heavenly ministry. Just as the high priest made his offering at the altar, and then carried the sacrificial blood through the veil into the holy place, so Jesus gave himself on the Cross, and straightway ascended through the heavens into the presence of God.

[1] He 13^{20}.

In order that we may better apprehend his priestly work in its unity, the Resurrection, as a separate episode, is left in the shadow. Nothing is allowed to disturb our certainty that through all the changing phases of his experience, Jesus remained the same, and accomplished his ministry, alike on earth and in heaven, " according to the power of an indissoluble life."

It was necessary that our High Priest, if he was indeed to act as our representative, should become one with his brethren. But this participation in the common lot of humanity was only one aspect of the priestly character. Before one man could appear before God in the name of the people he had to be invested with a special privilege—with a right of access which was denied to the others. As a mediator he required in some sense to stand midway between God and man. In the levitical system this relation to God was ensured by a divine ordinance whereby a descendant of Aaron was singled out from the mass of the people and consecrated. How was it secured in the case of Jesus, who did not possess the official claim ? The answer is—and here we arrive at the main Christological problem—that Jesus was a priest in virtue of his own nature. He was able to draw near to God on our behalf because he was himself related to God as His Son.

In working out this conception of the Sonship of Christ the writer takes his departure from the primitive doctrine of the Messiah. Again and again in the course

of the Epistle the language of Messianic prophecy is applied to Jesus. He came as it was written of him "in the volume of the book," [1] and will return for the deliverance of his people as the glorified Messiah.[2] In the passage which explains the death of Jesus as a destruction of the power of the devil, the writer associates himself quite definitely with the Messianic beliefs of the primitive church.[3] Occasionally, as where he describes Jesus as a greater Joshua, he appears to fall back on the Old Testament conception of a national Messiah ; [4] but in such passages we have little difficulty in perceiving the larger spiritual idea beneath the traditional one. In our Epistle, as in the writings of Paul, the apocalyptic hope of the Messiah has wholly displaced that of the prophets. "The Coming One" is no longer the Son of David, but a pre-existent being—the heavenly man who, according to the mystical interpretation of the 8th Psalm, will finally put all things under his feet.[5]

Adhering as he does to the accepted Messianic doctrine, the writer is careful to maintain the full distinction between Jesus and God. The Messiah of the Apocalypses is never more than an angelic being, dependent for his exalted status and dignity on God's good pleasure. Even in a work like the Similitudes of Enoch, where Messianic theory is carried to its furthest limit, there is no hint of any community of nature between the transcendent God and the Son of man who is the agent of His will. So the writer of Hebrews, conceiving of

[1] He 10^{7}. [2] 9^{28}. [3] 2^{14}. [4] 4^{8}. [5] $2^{8.9}$.

Jesus as the Messiah, endeavours to keep within the bounds of Messianic speculation. His argument requires him to assign to Jesus an inherent right to draw near to God; yet he never ventures to affirm, in so many words, that Jesus was himself of divine nature. To be sure, the Son is exalted far above all angels. He sits down at God's right hand, as next in majesty to God. But in the very passages where this sovereign rank of the Son is most plainly asserted, it is implied that while raised above the angels he was in some sense one of them. On a day in eternity God had chosen him out from among his fellows, and had commanded them to worship him.[1] All the power with which he is clothed has been given him by God's appointment and decree.[2] The name of Son has been conferred on him, and betokens not so much an actual relationship as a signal honour and privilege.[3] This glory which he had obtained before his coming to earth has been enhanced yet more by his great sacrifice, so that he now dwells for ever in God's immediate presence.

But although he sets out from the Messianic idea, with its necessary limitations, the writer seeks to pass beyond it, or at least to make it capable of a larger content. His ultimate conception has little more than a formal identity with that of the apocalyptic Messiah, and in this advance on the primitive view we can trace the operation of two main motives. (1) In the first place, he clearly perceives that his whole argument falls to

[1] He 1^6. [2] 1^4. [3] 1^5.

the ground unless there is some inward and essential relation between Christ and God. If Christ is the perfect High Priest it is not enough that he should be an angelic being, however exalted—for in this case he would still be a created Spirit, no less separate from the unapproachable God than the earthly priest who ministered in the tabernacle. In order that his intercession may be real and effectual he must in some way participate in the divine nature. On this condition alone can we have the full assurance that through him we draw near to God. The Messianic conception, as understood by apocalyptic Judaism, is therefore merged in another, which is never explicitly defined. Christ was the Son, not merely in the sense that he was a heavenly being who had been raised to peculiar honour, but in the more intimate meaning of Sonship. He has sat down at God's right hand in virtue of some real affinity of his own nature with that of God.

(2) But this heightening of the old Messianic conception, demanded though it was by the logic of the priestly doctrine, would not have been possible apart from some existing sanction in Christian thought. For more than a generation the conviction had been growing stronger, in all sections of the church, that the Messianic idea was not fully adequate to the new faith. Not only was it wrapt up with Jewish hopes and imaginations with which the Gentile mind could have little sympathy, but in itself it failed to satisfy the deeper instincts of believers. This is clearly apparent in the

religion of Paul, who is conscious of a new life, a larger freedom, a revelation of the grace and love of God, that have been imparted to him in Christ. In the effort to explain to himself this divine significance of the gospel he is constantly breaking through the restrictions of Messianic theory. The writer of Hebrews has likewise attained to a wider conception of the Christian message, and finds the traditional forms incapable of expressing it. Jesus is the same yesterday and for ever. He is the Leader and Perfecter of faith. He has cleansed our conscience from dead works and brought us to the living God. In view of all that he has proved himself to be, in Christian experience, the Messianic theory, inherited from the dreams and surmises of the past, has become insufficient, if not meaningless. It must be exchanged for some deeper and more comprehensive theory if we are rightly to interpret the work of Christ. The Epistle does not succeed in its endeavour to arrive at this new conception. Its doctrine of Christ is at the best vague and tentative—a mosaic of various speculations which fall asunder when we try to think them together. Here, as in other respects, we have to recognise in Hebrews the product of a transition age, which was breaking away at every point from the earlier teaching while still acknowledging its authority.

The higher value which is attached to the Messianic character of Jesus finds expression in the name "the Son of God," or more briefly "the Son." This name appears to have been current in the church from an

early time, and did not of itself involve any speculative theory of the relation of Christ to God. For Hebraic thought the category of Sonship had a wide and indeterminate meaning. As applied to the Messiah in apocalyptic literature it signified no more than that he was a heavenly being, who occupied a unique place in the counsels of God. But when the name had once been endorsed by the church as an alternative to the name "Messiah," it lent itself to those Hellenistic ideas which were constantly gaining ground, and covered them with its sanction. When Paul speaks of "the Son of God" he is still far from the doctrine of the later creeds, but he certainly has much more in his mind than the original Messianic conception. As the Son of God, Christ is in some sense divine—reflecting in his face the light of the knowledge of God. He is the Lord, who died and rose again, that through union with him we might attain to the divine life. In the Fourth Gospel the name is detached altogether from the Messianic tradition. It becomes the symbol of a new doctrine that Jesus, even while he lived on earth, was the manifestation of God—the eternal Son, through whom we know the Father. The writer of Hebrews has not yet risen to this conception of the divine Sonship. His thought is rooted in the Old Testament, and even when he addresses to Christ the adoring words of the Psalmist, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever," he remains fully conscious of the qualified sense in which they must be understood. None the less, he

employs the name of "Son" with a peculiar emphasis. It connotes for him not merely the Messianic dignity of Jesus, but the inward relation that subsists between him and God. He was fitted to be our High Priest and Mediator because he was of divine origin and shared in the divine nature, although he became in all points like unto his brethren.

This new conception of the Messianic Sonship is made possible by the Logos doctrine, which had been the most notable contribution of Alexandria to the theology of Judaism. It is true that nowhere in the Epistle is Christ expressly identified with the Logos; indeed, we cannot but feel that this term is studiously avoided. Perhaps it had not yet acclimatised itself in Christian thought; perhaps the Messianic tradition, to which it was entirely alien, exerted a restraining influence on the writer's mind. Nevertheless, he opens the Epistle with a clear reference to the Alexandrian doctrine, availing himself of terms and figures which may have been borrowed directly from Philo. The Son in whom God has spoken to us is "the effulgence of his glory," and "the express image of his nature" —a being who is related to God as the radiance to the central light, or the impression to the seal. The functions ascribed to him are likewise those which in Philo pertain to the Logos. He is the agent of revelation, so that God Himself is fully manifested to us now that the Son has appeared. He is the agent of creation, through whom the transcendent God, remote

from all contact with material things, has made the worlds. It is noteworthy, however, that these ideas are confined to the opening chapter, and are introduced for the one purpose of enhancing the superiority of the Son to the angels. In the body of the Epistle the conception of Christ as the self-revelation of God is left entirely to one side. His activity in creation is recalled for one moment when it is argued that he is greater than Moses, "inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house." But this passing allusion to his cosmical significance is at once guarded by the addition, "He that built all things is God." [1]

It is only in the introductory verses, therefore, that the Logos conception is definitely traceable, and the inference has sometimes been drawn that it has no integral place in the writer's thought. But he cannot have set it in the very forefront of the Epistle without a purpose. We are justified in presuming, as in the similar case of the Fourth Gospel, that the prologue is meant to illuminate all the chapters that follow. In the conviction that Christ was one with the eternal Logos, we are to examine the nature of his redeeming work, so as to obtain a deeper insight into its worth and efficacy. The prologue, in the view of some scholars, must be taken as the key of the Epistle in a more definite sense. They maintain that the central doctrine of the High-Priesthood of Christ is to be

[1] He $3^{3.4}$.

construed in strict accordance with the Logos theory; and the evidence for this opinion is at first sight impressive. Philo, in the same manner as our writer, discovers a profound import in the Old Testament ritual, and dwells, like him, with a special predilection on the ministry of the high priest. Again and again he compares this ministry with that of the Logos in language that seems to anticipate the language of Hebrews. "And the Father who created the universe has given to his archangelic and most ancient Logos a pre-eminent gift—to stand on the confines of both, separating that which has been created from the Creator. And this same Logos is continually a suppliant to the immortal God on behalf of the mortal race, which is exposed to affliction and misery. And the Logos rejoices in the gift, saying, 'And I stand in the midst, between the Lord and you,' neither being self-existent like God, nor yet created as you, but being in the midst, a hostage, as it were, to both."[1] "For we say that the High Priest is not a man, but the Logos of God, who has not only no participation in intentional errors, but none even in those which are involuntary."[2] "But examine the great High Priest, that is, the Logos."[3] "You see that even the high priest, that is to say, the Logos, who might at all times remain and reside in the holy dwelling of God, has not free permission to approach Him at all times, but only once a year; for whatever is associated with reason

[1] *Quis heres.* 42. [2] *De Fuga.* 20. [3] *De Migr.* 18.

by utterance is not firm, because it is of a twofold nature. But the safest course is to contemplate the living God by the soul alone, without utterance of any voice, for He exists in the indivisible One."[1] In view of these and a number of similar passages it might appear as if the thesis of the Epistle to the Hebrews were rooted in Alexandrian doctrine. The Christian writer has taken over the Philonic conception of the Logos as "the great high priest," and has applied it, with a few necessary modifications, to the work of Christ. But this conclusion ceases to be tenable when we have regard not merely to coincidences of language and metaphor, but to underlying ideas. The thought which Philo expresses, in his allegorical fashion, by comparing the Logos to the high priest, is a purely abstract and philosophical one. He conceives of Reason as the mediating principle between God and His creation. The world as a whole is brought into relation with God, in so far as it is pervaded by an immanent reason which is allied with the divine nature. Man, as a rational creature, participates in the universal reason, and under its guidance can enter into communion with God. It may be that Philo endows the Logos with a certain personality, and has something more in his mind than an expressive metaphor when he speaks of its priestly activity. But in any case he thinks of the approach to God in a purely intellectual manner. The Logos, in the last resort, is nothing else

[1] *De Gigant.* 12.

than the divine reason, which by its operation in the human soul acts as intermediary between God and man. Inasmuch as we share in this higher principle we are able to transcend the bounds of our earthly nature and to participate in the life of God. The fundamental differences between the teaching of our Epistle and this metaphysical doctrine hardly need to be insisted on. For the writer of Hebrews Christ is not an abstract essence, but a living Person, and his priesthood is inseparable from his personal attributes and experiences. He exercises his ministry in no merely figurative sense, but is an actual high priest, who comes before God with a literal sacrifice. His work of mediation consists not in communicating to us the divine nature as it exists in Reason, but in cleansing us from the sin which has kept us distant from God. It is evident that the writer of Hebrews is moving in a world of thought that is altogether apart from that of Philo. When we try to correlate his doctrine of the high-priesthood of Christ with the speculative idea of the reconciling Logos, we involve the whole teaching of the Epistle in a hopeless confusion.

In one sense, however, the Logos theory has a real bearing on the conception of the work of Christ which is set before us in Hebrews. In order that Christ should act as our High Priest it is necessary that his relation to God should be grounded in his very nature; for otherwise he would himself rank among created beings, and could afford us no true access to the divine presence.

By investing him with the attributes not only of the Messiah but of the Philonic Logos, the writer ensures for him this inward relation to God. The Logos doctrine, therefore, although it seems to disappear after the opening chapter, is implicit in the argument throughout. It does not displace the Messianic idea, as in the Fourth Gospel, but is blended with it, in such a manner as to enhance its scope and significance. Jesus is the Messiah, who was exalted by God above all angels, but he is also Son of God, in the sense that he is inherently of divine nature. He brings us near to God because he is himself united with God as His Son.

The Epistle, then, is concerned with the nature of Christ only in so far as it throws light on the work he has accomplished. This work is summed up under the category of priesthood, and in order to clothe him with all the attributes of the ideal High Priest the writer avails himself of different conceptions which had arisen in the church—weaving them together without much regard to their mutual consistency. Jesus is a heavenly being, whom God had chosen out for sovereign honour. He is the Messiah, who had existed before the foundation of the world, and who had yet become man and had lived a true human life. He is one with the Logos, who is in inward fellowship with God, and through whom he effects His work of creation and revelation. Out of these diverse elements the writer constructs his picture of the great High Priest. Jesus can minister on our

behalf in the heavenly sanctuary because he was himself a man and knew our needs and infirmities—because he was the Messiah, exalted to a place above all angels—because as the Logos he shares in the nature of God, and abides with Him for ever. The manifold aspects under which his personality is regarded are brought into apparent unity in the name of Son, which is purposely chosen because of its vagueness. It suggests an intimate dependence of Christ on God, while affirming nothing definite as to its character. It binds together superficially a number of speculations which could not have been harmonised in a reasoned theological doctrine. The writer does not occupy himself with the problem of the Person of Christ for its own sake. His interest is centred in the eternal High Priest, and he presses into his service everything that may give fulness and meaning to this one conception.

The doctrine of Christ which comes before us in Hebrews cannot be reduced to theological consistency, but for religion it has a permanent value. No Christian faith is possible which does not discern, however it may express it, a twofold significance in the Person of Christ. He was our brother man, who inspires our love and confidence because he made himself one with us in our common lot. He also stood apart from men, and had power to impart a new life and bring us nearer to God because he was thus "separated from sinners and made higher than the heavens." The Epistle to the

Hebrews, more than any other New Testament writing, has done justice to these two different elements in our faith. They are not strictly defined, and no attempt is made to reconcile them, but for this very reason men have been able to respond to the conception of Christ which is set forth in the Epistle. If the writer had sought to elaborate some formal doctrine of the Two Natures he would only have added another to the speculative Christologies which from time to time have chilled and perplexed the devotion of the church. As it was, he was content to dwell on the fact, without trying to explain it, that Jesus was at once our brother and our Lord. And if theology can make little of his doctrine, it has impressed its meaning clearly on the hearts and imaginations of Christian men. They have cherished the Epistle because it presents to them, as in a living picture, the Christ in whom they have trusted—the Man who was tempted as we are, and who is yet our Intercessor at the right hand of God.

CHAPTER IX.

FAITH.

In the theological discussion with which he has been mainly occupied the writer of Hebrews has never lost sight of his practical purpose. He has sought to convince his readers of the surpassing worth of Christianity in order that they may realise more fully the obligations that are laid on them, and so hold fast without wavering. The great chapter in praise of faith grows naturally, therefore, out of the previous argument. At first sight it may seem to be nothing more than a splendid rhetorical outburst, with no definite relation to the body of the Epistle; and from this point of view it is usually read and explained. But we miss half its significance unless we consider it not only as integral to the whole discussion, but as, in some sense, its outcome and culmination.

The writer himself supplies a definition of what he understands by faith. It is "the confidence of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen"—in other words, it affords us the certainty of what is still in the region of hope, and makes invisible things as real to us as if they were seen and demonstrated. The account which follows is entirely in keeping with this definition. Faith

is described as that attitude of soul to which future and unseen things are so sure that they become actual —more truly so than if they were apprehended by the senses. Examples are multiplied from Old Testament history which illustrate and bring home to us this meaning of faith. It is shown that the ancient saints and heroes had endured as seeing the invisible, and had triumphed over change and death because they worked in the power of a far distant future. From the beginning the people of God had rooted their lives in faith, and had found in it their strength and inspiration.

The conception of faith which is here set before us is different from any other that we encounter in the New Testament. For Paul, faith is the response of man to the gracious will of God revealed in Christ— the act of trust and self-surrender apart from which we cannot receive the offered gift. It is directed in the last resort to God, but its immediate object is Christ, and more definitely the Cross of Christ, which is the supreme revelation of the divine love. The Christian message, as understood by Paul, has no other purpose than to awaken in us this faith, whereby we accept, without reserve or misgiving, the free gift of God. In the Fourth Gospel, as in the writings of Paul, faith is the indispensable condition on which the gift is imparted, but in itself it marks only an initial stage. It consists not so much in a disposition of the will as in an act of belief, and needs to be supplemented by knowledge, obedience, inward fellowship with Christ,

before it reaches its issue in eternal life. But the Pauline and Johannine conceptions are alike grounded in one which can be traced back to the earliest days of the church. The followers of Jesus were from the outset "the believers" (*οἱ πιστεύοντες*) marked off from the body of their countrymen by their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. By so accepting him they constituted themselves his people, to whom he would grant salvation when he returned to bring in his kingdom. The later theories of faith are developed by a natural process from this primitive idea. With the deepening of the Christian consciousness the act of belief in Jesus, in virtue of which the convert was baptised into the new community, was fraught with an ever richer meaning. It involved not merely an assent to the claims of Jesus, but submission to his rule of life and personal trust in him as the revelation of the divine love and grace.

Now in Hebrews we are still reminded of the primitive conception of faith. The writer describes himself and his readers by the usual term *οἱ πιστεύοντες*, and in several passages employs the word *πίστις* in its ordinary sense of belief in a message.[1] More generally, however, when he thinks of the act of assent by which a man becomes incorporated in the church he speaks of the *ὁμολογία*, the "confession," and in this he includes not only the recognition of Jesus as Lord, but the whole group of beliefs which make up the Christian doctrine.

[1] Cf. He 4^2 13^7.

We have here one of the clearest indications that the mood of the Apostolic Age is in process of transition to that of the later Catholic church. Faith in Christ, as it had formerly been understood, has almost come to be identified with the acquiescence in a given creed. Indeed it would hardly be too much to say that while Christ is still the one centre of Christianity, as in the earlier teaching, he is no longer the object of faith, as he had been to Paul. He is "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession," the "mediator of the new covenant," but it is taken for granted that faith must be "faith towards God," [1] and must begin with the conviction "that He is, and is the rewarder of them who seek Him." [2] The office of Christ is that of an intermediary, through whom we have access to the God in whom we believe. And just as under the old covenant the condition of approach to God was not some personal relation to the high priest, but incorporation with the people for whom he ministered, so in Christianity. The work of Christ is primarily effected for the holy community, with which we become identified by sharing in the "confession." From the logical consequences of this mode of thought, as they shaped themselves in the ecclesiastical system of the following age, the writer is saved by his instinct for spiritual realities. It is self-evident to him that the faith which saves must be a living activity in the soul, and not a mere formal assent to the beliefs which the Church imposes on its

[1] He 6^{1}. [2] 11^{6}.

members. But to secure this vital character to faith he is compelled to invest it with an entirely new meaning.

A change of this kind is the necessary consequence of the view of Christianity as the new covenant, which is continuous with the old, although it has perfected and transcended it. For Paul the gospel marks a fresh departure in God's dealings with men, inasmuch as it makes its appeal to faith, and to faith alone. Formerly God had revealed His will by the Law, and what He demanded was a righteousness consisting wholly in obedience to the Law. This old dispensation has now been swept away, and has given place to another, in which the grace of God is all in all. Faith is the new principle of the religious life, corresponding to this new revelation. But the writer of Hebrews is committed, by his fundamental position, to a different view. He believes that all through the history of the past the purpose of God has been moving towards its fulfilment, and that Christianity is the new covenant in the sense that it has perfected the covenant already made with Israel. The faith which it requires must therefore have had its counterpart in the past. This, indeed, must be the chief significance of faith—that it has always been the inspiring motive of God's people, and unites them together as one company. For his examples of faith the writer goes back to Old Testament history, not because these ancient names are most familiar to his readers or because they have acquired a peculiar sacredness, but for the very reason that they belong to the Old

Testament. These were the heroes of the former covenant, the vanguard of the army in which we also are enrolled and which will presently achieve its victory. In the knowledge of their warfare we learn the conditions of our own. It was faith that upheld and directed them, and by faith we shall attain the goal towards which they struggled.

This conception, then, involves a radical change from that which had hitherto prevailed in the Christian teaching. The saints of the past, however worthy of our admiration, had known nothing of the faith which accepts Jesus as Lord and responds to the grace of God as manifested in his Cross. If faith is to stand as the watchword, not only of the new "confession" but of the religion which had gone before, its meaning must be construed differently. How does the writer arrive at that conception of faith which he defines at the beginning of the eleventh chapter? It appears nowhere else in the New Testament, and for the nearest parallel we must turn to Alexandrian Judaism.

In a number of passages, scattered throughout his writings, Philo makes reference to faith, to which he assigns an all-important place in his theory of knowledge. Starting from the simple Hebraic conception of faith as the belief in God and His promises, he proceeds to show that this belief, which might appear a very easy thing, is in reality difficult. Only the loftiest natures, after long discipline and preparation, can attain to

"that most perfect of the virtues, faith." [1] Subject as we are to the material conditions of this world we naturally put our trust in the things we see—wealth, pleasure, friendships, earthly grandeur and might. With our understanding we must needs acknowledge the fact of God, but we fail to apprehend it with any real strength and conviction in the presence of those other forces which impose themselves so immediately on our senses. A genuine faith, as evinced, for example, in the life of Abraham, implies a turning away from the world of sense to the invisible God. "To disbelieve in creation, which in itself is untrustworthy, and to believe in the only true and faithful God, is the work of a great and heavenly mind, which is no longer allured or influenced by any of the circumstances usually affecting human life." [2] On its negative side, therefore, faith is the denial of all appearances—the conviction that the visible things around us have no true and ultimate existence. On the positive side it is the assurance that the one reality behind all things is God. "To believe in God is to know that everything changes, and that He alone is unchangeable." [3]

This idea, however, which is grounded in the religion of Philo, is expanded in characteristic fashion in accordance with his philosophy. Over against the created world, as perceived by the senses, he places the ideal, intelligible world which has its existence in the mind of God. In order to attain to the higher life we must

[1] *Quis heres.* 18. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Leg. Alleg.* ii. 22.

rise to the contemplation of those eternal forms which are dimly reflected in the visible material things and constitute their essence. Of ourselves we are incapable of this true knowledge, but "God has implanted in the mind a power of comprehending that world which is appreciable only to the intellect apart from sense" [1]— and this power is faith. By means of it we are brought into contact with those realities the very existence of which would otherwise be veiled from us, and it must therefore be regarded as "the queen of all virtues," [2] since on it depends the very possibility of all higher knowledge.

Properly speaking, then, faith is the starting-point, the necessary condition of spiritual progress. It is an intuitive conviction of a world of truth which lies beyond the senses, and from this conviction we can advance, by way of a given discipline, to an ever-growing knowledge. But in Philo's mind faith assumes a yet higher significance as not only the beginning, but the end of all our endeavour. Knowledge itself becomes nothing more than a means to faith, since it is by faith that we apprehend God, who is above all knowledge. "He who has in all sincerity believed God has by so doing received a disbelief in all things which are created and perishable, beginning with all things in himself which exalt themselves very highly, such as reason and outward sense. For reason, thinking that to it pertains the decision on things intelligible and unchanging, is

[1] *Quis rerum.* 22. [2] *De Abrah.* 46.

frequently in error. But the man to whom it has been granted to lean and found himself on God alone, with unalterable and sure confidence, is truly happy and blessed."[1] The same thought is elsewhere expressed even more plainly. "Therefore the only real and true and lasting good is faith in God—the comfort of life, the fulfilment of all good hopes, the absence of all evils, who is able to do all things, but who wills to do only what is best. For as men who are going along a slippery road stumble and fall, but they who proceed by a plain path journey without stumbling, so they who hasten towards God are guiding their souls in a safe and untroubled path. So that we may say with absolute truth that the man who trusts in the good things of the body disbelieves in God, and that he who distrusts them believes in Him."[2] To believe in God is the same as to cleave to God, and by so doing to possess the holiest and most blessed life. Philo[3] sometimes appears to speak as if faith, in its highest form, is only attainable in a condition of ecstasy; but he also recognises a faith which is a constant disposition of the soul.[4] He thinks of chosen natures as at last escaping altogether from the bondage of the senses, and finding their true home in the eternal world even while they sojourn on earth.

The affinity between the Philonic conception and that which meets us in the Epistle is unmistakable. For both thinkers the belief in God carries with it the

[1] *De præm. et pœn.* 5.
[2] *De Abrah.* 46.
[3] *Quis rerum.* 22.
[4] *De confus. lingu.* 9.

certainty that He is the ground of all existence. For both it is therefore associated with the belief in higher realities, out of which the visible things have proceeded. To reach beyond the changing appearances and lay hold of the divine realities is faith. Alike in the writings of Philo and in our Epistle faith is the one principle of the true life. It enables us to rise superior to all earthly powers, which are at best illusory, and to find our home in the eternal world.

It is not necessary to conclude that the writer of Hebrews was directly acquainted with the teaching of Philo. His apparent dependence on it is sufficiently explained from a general sympathy with the Alexandrian mode of thought, which had made its influence felt on all educated Jews of the Dispersion. The belief that all things visible were the shadows of divine originals, existing in the mind of the great Architect, allied itself naturally with that faith in God which had ever been the central motive in Hebrew religion. That the doctrine of our Epistle, while akin to that of Philo, is not merely borrowed from him, becomes evident when we turn from the broad resemblances to several significant differences.

(1) In the first place, the idea of faith as it appears in Philo is closely connected with a theory of knowledge. It is assumed that the objects of sense are indicative of something beyond them—of the essential forms which only the pure intelligence can discern. The function of faith is to make this true knowledge possible by

vouching for the existence of that ideal world towards which the mind must direct itself. This philosophical interest has no place in Hebrews, or at any rate is altogether secondary. The writer does not conceive of faith as an instrument of knowledge, but as a moral energy, which has its outcome in action and endurance. By means of it the men of old subdued kingdoms and wrought righteousness, and it still gives strength to bear up and conquer. The existence of the higher world is to our writer certain, and he does not trouble to inquire how this certainty has come to him. His one interest is in the inward power which it communicates.

(2) Again, the idea of *futurity*, of which we have little trace in Philo, is strongly emphasised in the Epistle. Faith is "the substance of things hoped for" as well as "the evidence of things not seen." The examples recounted in the eleventh chapter are chiefly concerned with this aspect of faith as a confident hope, overcoming all discouragement and apparent defeat. By it the heroes of old pressed forward to a goal that lay far beyond the horizon of their own lifetime. They accepted God's promise and rested on it, just as securely as if it were already fulfilled. They never doubted in the face of death itself that the cause for which they had laboured would survive them, and was even now advancing to victory. Sometimes, indeed, as it is described in the chapter, faith would seem to be nothing but another name for the hope that grasps the future amidst the

darkness of the present; but this idea of hope is combined throughout with that of the conviction which justifies the hope. For the man of faith the unseen things are the only certainties. He knows that his work will triumph because it is wrought in the power of those certainties, and since it is bound up with them will outlast the opposition of the world.

(3) Once more, the Philonic conception is blended in Hebrews with eschatological ideas. Faith in God involves a trust in His promises, and these are all summed up in the promise of a new age, which will set in with the glorious coming of the Messiah. It is shown that in all ages faith has been directed towards this consummation. The saints of the old covenant had foreseen the great future when God's people would enter into their inheritance, and the thought of it had sustained them in their seemingly aimless struggle. Our Christian faith still reaches towards that fulfilment, which, however, is no longer distant, but has come almost within our grasp. It cannot be said that the conception of faith is vitally modified by the eschatological colouring which is thus imparted to it. The fundamental idea, for our author as for Philo, is that of a firm belief in unseen realities, and the Christian hope for the Kingdom of God is so interpreted as to fall into harmony with this belief. Nevertheless, in the effort to adapt the Alexandrian doctrine to the expectation of early Christianity, the writer is obliged to place it in a new context. The invisible things to which faith

is turned are no longer viewed in the abstract. They are brought into relation to those definite hopes which can be traced, from age to age, in the history of God's people.

In these respects, then, the idea of faith in Hebrews is different from that of Philo. We have to do with a conception which has its roots in the Alexandrian teaching, but has been transplanted into Christian soil, and in the process has undergone a change. At the same time the writer is not wholly successful in his endeavour to connect faith, as he understands it, with the message of Christianity. Instead of making it the distinctive principle of Christian action, he regards it as the link of continuity between the old covenant and the new. Christians are exhorted to live by faith, not only because they look to Jesus as their Captain, but because they stand in the glorious succession which has come down through Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. The question thus arises as to whether the author recognises in Christian faith anything that is new and distinctive. He appears to take the very watchword of the gospel and explain it in terms of the Old Testament, with the result that Jesus himself becomes only the last and greatest in the long roll of saints and heroes. It must be admitted that we have here a difficulty which gravely perplexes us when we pass from the earlier writings to this Epistle. We cannot but ask ourselves whether Christianity has any

new motive to offer, if the faith to which it calls us is no other than that which has inspired all true servants of God from the beginning.

The writer is not unaware of this difficulty, and endeavours to meet it along different lines. On the one hand, he insists on the higher degree of certainty which accompanies Christian faith. The fathers could only salute the promises afar off, and comfort themselves with the thought of a fulfilment in which they would not themselves share. For us this distant hope has become an absolute assurance, now that Christ has appeared as the High Priest of good things to come. The exhortation of the Epistle is based in large measure on this certainty that has now been added to faith. Ever and again it is impressed on the readers that they must display a more steadfast courage, and a deeper sense of their responsibilities than the men of the old covenant, who had nothing to support them but the bare promise of what would be. Their successors in "these last days" are in clear sight of the goal. They have only to endure for a little time longer, and they will attain.

But another and more vital distinction is drawn between Christian faith and that which was possible under the old covenant. In former times, according to the argument of the Epistle, all worship was fragmentary and symbolical; and this, we are given to understand, was true also of faith. It was still unconscious of the larger issues that were bound up

with it. The objects on which it was set were great and noble, but they were concerned with earthly things —the possession of the promised land, victory in some conflict of the hour, fulfilment of a task which to all but a few seemed visionary. In spite of these limitations, it was faith in the unseen realities. Those ancient servants of God, as they directed their gaze beyond the immediate horizon, had an aim before them which was far grander than they knew. They were seeking for a city which hath foundations ; they were working towards an end which would always be withheld from them on earth, and to which they could only attain in the Sabbath rest of God. And faith, as we know it now, has become aware of its ultimate goal. As Christians we have been brought face to face with those realities which our fathers dimly surmised— the heavenly world, the final deliverance, the consummation of all things in God's Kingdom. The faith to which Christ summons us is a faith that knows what it seeks for, and will not be satisfied until it has grasped " the very image of the things."

In Hebrews, therefore, Christ has still a supreme significance for faith, although he has ceased to be its object, as in the religion of Paul. (1) He is set before us, first, as the Great Pattern, who sums up in himself the whole meaning of that life of faith which is exemplified in the history of God's people. By faith he overcame every weakness, and endured to the end, in the face of all difficulty and opposition. He foresaw

the heavenly glory prepared for him, and did not hesitate to accept the Cross, by which alone he could attain to it.[1] Looking to him we share in the faith that sustained him, and are able to fight our battle with the same assurance of triumph. (2) Again, he is not only the grand example, but the "Leader," without whom we could never enter on the life of faith. It is suggested that the faithful of past times, as well as those who have actually heard his message, were in some sense under his banner. They were striving unawares towards the fulfilment which could only be achieved through his coming, and are united by a living bond with the company of his redeemed people. Faith has, therefore, no meaning unless we relate it to Christ. (3) But he is more than the Example and the Leader; he is the "perfecter of faith"; [2] and in the light of what has been said already this phrase appears to bear an emphatic meaning. From the beginning, faith has implied an effort to lay hold of the invisible things, but hitherto it has fallen short of its true aim. Men were unable to discern that higher goal which at heart they were seeking, and set their desire on one end and another in which it was

[1] He 12^2: *ἀντὶ τῆς προκειμένης χαρᾶς*. The parallel with Ph 2^6 suggests the possible translation, "instead of the joy in his possession"; *i.e.* instead of clinging to his privilege as Son of God he became man, and embraced a life of suffering. But this idea is irrelevant to the passage as a whole. The verse, too, has its obvious counterpart in 11^{26}—"for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward."

[2] He 12^2.

faintly suggested. Jesus has perfected faith by directing it once for all to its final object. He endured the Cross with a clear vision of "the joy that was set before him," and the faith which inspires his people is conscious, like his own, of that which it seeks after. In its inner nature faith has always been the same, but now it has grown to its full strength, and has been freed from all that limited and obscured it. Between our faith and that of the fathers there is all the difference between a clear apprehension and a groping forward through the dark.

Christian faith is thus regarded at once as continuous with the faith of the past and as bringing it at last to its full issue. This twofold idea, which runs all through the chapter, finds striking expression in the words which close it: "They without us could not be made perfect." The writer appears to think, on the one hand, of the fruition which has at last crowned the unrewarded efforts of past days. We, in the appointed time, have entered into the inheritance, but it belongs no less to those who believed in it and worked for it while it was still distant. They were sustained by the thought of our day, as we are by their example. They rejoiced to know that in our possession of "some better thing" their faith would be vindicated and their labour brought to its completion. But this wider truth which is undoubtedly present to the writer's mind is coloured by the realistic ideas which prevailed in the early church.

He thinks of the faithful of past times as sharing in some actual sense in the blessings which have been reserved for the last favoured generation. The reunion of all God's people in the heavenly Jerusalem is described in glowing rhetorical language, which ought not, perhaps, to be pressed too literally; but the main idea is in keeping with the apocalyptic outlook which the writer is careful to preserve amidst all his speculation. He anticipates a day when the heroes of the past will obtain the promises which in their lifetime they could only salute afar off. Their spirits have been waiting for the fulfilment which could not be until we had received the message of Christ, and through us they are "made perfect." Along with us, to whom the faith they lived by has become certainty, they are admitted to their citizenship in heaven.

The doctrine of faith has therefore an integral place in the Epistle, and gathers to a head several of its most characteristic lines of thought. (1) It gives clear and vivid expression to the idea that the new covenant is inseparable from the old. This is now demonstrated by no mere abstract arguments, but by a survey of the actual history. We are made to realise that in our Christian calling we are united with the great company of God's people, who in all ages have lived and died by faith. (2) While the continuity is thus emphasised, the newness of the covenant is thrown into stronger relief. It is shown that our Christian faith, while it

binds us to the past, is the pledge and evidence of a closer relation to God. The promises in which the fathers trusted have come to fulfilment. Faith, as we know it now, has been perfected, and can reach out directly to the goal which it has hitherto been seeking unawares. (3) The conception of a heavenly world, to which there is constant reference in the earlier part of the Epistle, is invested with a new significance. It was in the light of this conception that the writer interpreted the worth and meaning of the ministry of Christ—showing that it has fully accomplished, in the heavenly sphere, all that was typified and foreshadowed by the old worship. But this thought of a higher world which is reflected in the visible things is now set forth in its larger bearings. It is impressed on us that faith, by its very nature, is directed towards an unseen world, in which the shadows give place to the realities. Through Christ we have access to that unseen world, and the long quest of faith has thereby achieved its purpose.

Here, however, we perceive the vital connection of the 11th chapter not merely with particular aspects of the writer's thought, but with the grand thesis of his Epistle. He aims at proving that Christianity is the absolute religion, and his method has thus far been to contrast it point by point with the old covenant and assert its superiority. But he is not entirely satisfied with this mode of proof. It would be too much to say that he feels the inadequacy of a mere argument from Scripture, for he never doubts that the scriptural ordinances were

directly given by God, and that it is possible, by insight into their deeper issues, to discern the nature of the ultimate worship. None the less he is conscious that the discussion, as it stands, has taken too narrow a ground. If Christianity is the absolute religion there must be evidence of this in the very constitution of man's nature. Such witness he discovers in the faith which has been the guiding motive in the whole history of God's people. In all times they have possessed the sense of a higher, invisible world, and have striven, however darkly and uncertainly, to attain to it. Religion, in whatever form we find it, runs back to the conviction that beyond the transient and material things there is a world of higher reality; it springs, in other words, out of an impulse of faith. And the object of the great discussion in the closing part of Hebrews is to maintain that in Christianity faith has at last been satisfied. There can be no further stage in religion, for through Christ the aspiration which lies at the heart of all religion has reached its goal. The finality of the new covenant is attested, not only by the word of scripture and the institutions of the ancient worship, but by the perfect response which has now been offered to faith.

By his doctrine of faith, then, the writer completes and broadens his theological argument; but at the same time he links it more closely with the practical exhortation which is his chief purpose throughout. In

order to urge his readers to fidelity, endurance, courage in the face of difficulties, he has sought to bring home to them the supreme excellence of their religion. Through the great High Priest they have drawn nearer to God and the unseen world. They have become "the people of faith" [1] in a far higher sense than the saints of the old covenant, and their constant attitude will henceforth be one of faith. Looking always to the eternal things, which have now become so real to them, they will be patient and steadfast, and overcome the allurements of the passing world.

This train of thought is complicated by the double connection of the writer's idea of faith with the apocalyptic hope and with Alexandrian theory. In loyalty to the accepted teaching of the church he anticipates a new order which will set in with the return of Christ; and faith, from this point of view, is little more than a vivid foresense of the better future, supporting us amidst present evils. But in the light of Alexandrian doctrine the primitive conception of a new age now about to dawn is blended with another. The world of visible things is contrasted with one which is far more real, although it is hidden from the outward senses, and faith is the power by which we apprehend this heavenly world. It is not only a hope that lifts us into the future, but is the assurance of present though invisible realities. These two ideas are partly reconciled by the assumption that the new order which will

[1] He 10^{39}.

be manifested at the Parousia is no other than that which exists already in the higher sphere. A day is at hand when God will shake heaven and earth, overthrowing all that is perishable, so that the eternal world, which has ever been the true one, may be revealed.[1] But it has to be recognised that the two conceptions cannot so easily be brought into harmony. The apocalyptic hope has nothing in common with the philosophical doctrine, and while preserving it, in deference to the tradition, the writer has broken away from it. Faith, as he conceives it, has essentially the same meaning as it had to Philo. It consists in that higher faculty of vision whereby we escape from the illusions of sense, and identify ourselves with the world of true existence. The whole emphasis is laid, however, on the religious and practical side of this conception. With Philo faith is the principle of true knowledge ; with the Christian teacher it is an active power, which enables us to live victoriously in the strength of the unseen.

In our Epistle, therefore, the idea of faith is transferred from the realm of philosophy to that of religion ; but it still preserves the marks of its origin. Although the 11th chapter of Hebrews is undoubtedly one of the grandest and most moving passages in all Christian literature, its fundamental thought is alien to Christianity, or at any rate has become part of it only by a process of grafting. Faith, as we know it from the teaching of Jesus, is an absolute confidence in the justice and mercy

[1] He 12^{26-29}.

and redeeming will of God. Believing in Him as our Father we are prepared to serve Him gladly and to surrender our lives, without reserve or misgiving, to His direction. But for the writer of Hebrews, faith is not so much a moral as an intellectual assurance. It consists in the clear inward vision of a world of perfection on which we may set all aims and desires, and which causes all visible things to appear transient and unreal. This faith has indeed its issue in the life that bears patiently and grows strong out of weakness and vanquishes fear and temptation and the edge of the sword. Yet in its essence it is not so much Christian faith as a lofty idealism, and can find its inspiration, as the great chapter everywhere reminds us, in lives that were untouched by the definite Christian influences. That something is lacking in such a doctrine may be frankly recognised; but it must also be accounted as one of the writer's chief services to our religion that he has secured a place within Christianity for a conception so elevating, though originally foreign to it. The belief in a higher world in which earthly shadows and surmises give place to their fulfilment may not be the faith by which Jesus composed himself to sleep during the storm—by which he endured the contradiction of sinners and looked forward beyond the Cross to his victory; but it has its springs in the deep instincts of our nature. It has found utterance in all great art and poetry, and has reflected itself, under countless forms, in the higher speculations of every age. We

owe it to the writer of Hebrews that this belief, which has so profoundly influenced the intellectual life of humanity, has also become an element in our religion. It cannot be transformed into a living power unless behind it there is that simple trust in the heavenly Father which Jesus has awakened in us by his teaching, and by his life and death. But the message of Jesus himself has a new and larger meaning when we read it in the light of the immortal chapter which tells of faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

CHAPTER X.

THE HISTORICAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE EPISTLE.

An attempt has been made in the preceding chapters to review and interpret the theological ideas of the Epistle. It now remains to consider its historical value, and its permanent contribution to Christian thought.

Criticism has treated it, for the most part, as an historical document of secondary rank. It stands so much by itself in the New Testament that it seems to be a mere appendix to the central writings—the work of an erratic thinker who can at most have represented an obscure school. In some degree this judgment is well founded. The Epistle is an isolated product, occupied with a "gnosis," an esoteric interpretation which the author himself admits to be strange and novel. He is the teacher not so much of the whole church as of a select circle, to which he imparts his higher speculations on the common faith. There is no evidence that his peculiar view of the work of Christ was ever widely accepted. It was too individual, too much the outcome of reflection, to make its way into the popular

belief. But the very fact that the Epistle thus stands apart rather enhances than diminishes its value for Christian history. We have here a writing, confessedly of early date, which cannot be related to any other New Testament book. From this it can be inferred that there were more factors at work in the life of the early church than we commonly take into account. Besides Paul and John and the teachers whom we know, there were others, whose doctrines have now been lost, but who all contributed to the shaping of the general movement. The Epistle to the Hebrews serves to remind us of those unconsidered elements in first-century Christianity. By a fortunate accident it has been preserved to us, but it was only one of many presentations of the gospel which were put forward by early teachers, and left their mark on the later theology.

The Epistle, if we have rightly estimated its character, helps us to understand at least one of the main causes of this variety in primitive doctrine. Addressed as it is to a group of advanced converts, it is a typical example of the Gnosis which had an acknowledged place in the life of the church. The Christian revelation was supposed to contain a mystery, a deeper secret which needed to be explored; and a field was thus thrown open to what we should now call free speculation. Teachers who were endowed with special gifts of insight were at liberty to frame new doctrines on the basis of the common confession, and these doctrines, imparted in the first instance to chosen circles of disciples, came

in course of time to affect the beliefs of the church at large. This exercise of Gnosis, as the following generation was to discover, was fraught with serious danger, but undoubtedly it brought a wealth of new ideas and principles into Christian theology. The tradition which might have become prematurely fixed was broadened and quickened, and gathered into itself all that was most fruitful in the larger intellectual culture of the time. In the Epistle of Hebrews we have an authentic example of Gnosis, as it was practised at many centres during the later years of the first century. It enables us, in some measure, to determine the nature of this influence, and to understand the part which it played in the development of Christian thought.

But the view that Hebrews is a writing by itself—that it belongs to the side-currents and not to the central movement—is only half justified. In some respects it is one of the most representative of New Testament books. This is true, as we shall presently see, of its theological teaching; but it may be well to consider it first as a mere historical document, illustrative of the conditions which were everywhere moulding the character of the church.

Its value for this purpose cannot be questioned when we remember that it is the chief original work that has come down to us from the half-century between Paul and the Fourth Evangelist. This is the darkest period in all Christian history, illuminated by no great name,

and by scarcely any recorded incident. Yet in many ways it was the most critical of all periods. In that latter part of the first century the scattered communities were beginning to draw together into a world-wide organisation. The new religion became conscious of its future, and of the nature of the task imposed on it. Its connection with Judaism was finally broken, and it allied itself definitely with the wider interests of the Roman world. Of this decisive period, in which the transition was made from the earlier to the later type of Christianity, the Epistle to the Hebrews is the outstanding monument. What can we learn from it as to the influences that were gradually effecting the great change ?

In the first place, we have a number of highly significant references to persecution. It is evident that although they enjoyed comparative peace between the reigns of Nero and Domitian, the Christians were all the time exposed to peril. If they were not called on to " resist unto blood " they had continually to face unjust accusations, losses and robberies, outbreaks of popular hostility.[1] These sufferings, as the writer acknowledges, were a source of strength to the church in so far as they elicited a sense of brotherhood and a readiness for mutual help and sympathy. But their main effect, as he makes abundantly clear, was one of discouragement. All the more as they did not involve hardship on a heroic scale they tended to weaken and

[1] He 10^{32-34}.

depress the struggling church. Its members could not but feel that they were enlisted in a losing cause, and became half-ashamed of a religion that brought on them the aversion and contempt of their neighbours. Rightly to understand the Epistle, with its emphasis on the splendour of the New Covenant and its call to Christians to glory in their high vocation, we have to bear in mind this "reproach of Christ."

Even more significant are the allusions to a waning of enthusiasm. The church was now in its second or third generation, and the wave of exultant faith on which the work of the Apostles had been borne forward had at last spent itself. It was inevitable that the first great period should be followed by an interval of lassitude, and this mood was no doubt aggravated by the apparent failure of the primitive hopes. Year after year had passed without any sign of the longed-for Parousia, and it was growing ever more certain that the Kingdom of God, in the form which early faith had anticipated, would not come. The Epistle to Hebrews is our chief witness to the feeling of spiritual exhaustion which overtook the church as the century drew towards its close. There may not have been actual apostasy on any considerable scale, but Christian piety had lost its glow, and was becoming arid and mechanical. Much in the later development begins to explain itself when we realise that between the Apostolic Age and the second century there lay this difficult period. We can understand how religious ideas were impoverished, how re-

flection took the place of the free impulse of the Spirit, how an increasing value was attached to forms and institutions. A time was to come when the Church was again inspired with energy for its great task, but its later character had been shaped, in large measure, during that interval of reaction.

Another important fact is vividly brought before us in the Epistle. Christianity had now a *past* on which it could look back proudly. It had heroes and martyrs of its own, who could be ranked beside those of the old covenant. It cherished the memory of revered teachers, whose doctrines were already invested with a halo of authority. We are no longer in the first age, when the church had its face turned wholly to the future, and was striking out new paths, unhindered by custom and tradition. Anything that was novel had now to be reconciled with that which had been handed down. We can gather from Hebrews that this consciousness of the past has supplied an additional motive to faith and endeavour. Christians have an obligation laid on them to maintain their heritage unimpaired and to prove themselves worthy of it. They can hold fast their confession, knowing that behind it there is the witness of two generations of believers, in whose lives it has been tested. Jesus Christ is the same to-day as he was yesterday. Nevertheless, the freedom of Christian thought has already begun to be hampered by the past. The living beliefs of an earlier age are hardening into a creed, which the church accepts for no other reason

than that it has been inherited. With those "first principles of the doctrine of Christ" the writer does not concern himself. They have to be taken for granted, without further question, as the settled foundation for some higher kind of knowledge.

Once more, the Epistle is itself a striking evidence of a new element which had now entered the life of the church, and which was destined to make its influence felt, ever more powerfully. Paul had admitted, in the generation before, that "not many wise are called." His converts, while including not a few men and women of exceptional gifts, were mostly gathered from classes which had little share in the higher culture of the age. We cannot tell who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews, but in any case he was a man of philosophical training, the master of a noble rhetoric, an adept in the methods of the schools. He takes for granted that the audience he addresses will be able to appreciate his mode of reasoning, and will recognise the background of his thought. From all this it is clear that the church had begun to attract a new type of converts—men of education, who were seeking in Christianity an answer to their intellectual doubts and problems; and such men were henceforth to take the leading part in the making of theology. The intuition and religious feeling of the earlier period were replaced more and more by careful investigation. A conscious attempt was made not only to unfold the Christian ideas to their logical issues, but to combine them with the results of philo-

sophical thinking. This new era in the development of our religion begins with the Epistle to the Hebrews. Its author may be regarded, in some respects, as the first of the theological doctors, the precursor of Justin and Irenæus and the great Alexandrians.

In all these aspects the Epistle illustrates for us the historical conditions of that obscure but momentous period out of which it comes. And with all its eccentricity of doctrine, it enables us, better perhaps than any other writing, to discern the forces at work in the purely theological movement. The author is not an individual thinker in the sense that he breaks away from the ideas of his age and tries to restate the Christian message in entirely new terms. On the contrary, he takes his stand firmly on the " confession " as it was held by the church at large, and presupposes it in all his thinking. His Gnosis, original as it is, attaches itself to the current theology and grows out of it.

This is apparent when we note the many points of analogy between the teaching of Hebrews and that of the Apologists in the century following. In both cases we have the same defensive attitude, the same philosophical assumptions, the same allegorical use of Scripture. Not a few ideas which may almost be regarded as the signature of later ecclesiastical doctrine are already anticipated in Hebrews. It assumes, for instance, that there are two grades of Christians—the ordinary believers and those who proceed to higher " knowledge."

It opens the controversy as to whether repentance is possible in the case of grave sins committed after baptism.[1] Such affinities with second-century thought can only be explained on the one hypothesis, that the writer is in full accord with the tendencies which were coming to be dominant in the church. He foreshadows within the New Testament itself the later Catholic Christianity. For this reason we are probably to regard him as nearer than Paul to the main path of the Christian movement. We are accustomed to think of Paul as the one commanding Apostle, to whose standards the whole church gradually conformed; but it may fairly be doubted whether his gospel was ever, in any real sense, representative. It was the outcome of a unique mind and a unique experience. It maintained itself with difficulty even in Paul's lifetime and in the churches which he himself had founded, while the theology of the succeeding age moved steadily away from it. Our knowledge of the primitive conditions is fragmentary at the best; but if we knew more we should perhaps discover that the author of Hebrews was a more typical figure than Paul. So far from reflecting an erratic phase of doctrine he stood for the normal Christianity, with which Paul had been dissatisfied.

In one respect, however, this view is subject to modification. The writer of Hebrews shows hardly a trace

[1] He 6^{4-6}.

of the mystical and sacramental ideas which are characteristic of the later piety. It is true that in several places he alludes to Baptism, describing it by the technical term "enlightenment" (φωτισμός), which had been taken over from pagan religion. But it nowhere appears that the sacraments have any vital import for him; indeed the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is never even mentioned. We have here one of the problems of the Epistle, though it admits of several possible solutions. In the first place, the writer is sensible that his readers are lapsing into a mechanical religion, and may purposely have kept silence on those observances which tended to supplant a living faith. The Fourth Evangelist, with all his insistence on the mystical worth of the sacraments, is aware of this danger, and is careful to distinguish between the spiritual content and the mere outward rite. The author of Hebrews may be silently protesting, in like manner, against the growing sacramentalism of his time. Again, whatever may have been his attitude to the sacraments, he could not but feel that any stress upon them would have conflicted with his main argument. He is contrasting the old covenant with the new as the religion of symbols which had now been superseded by that of realities. The force of the contrast would certainly have been weakened if he had made much of the symbolical ordinances which still found their place in Christianity. Once more, and here perhaps we have the true answer to the riddle—his mind was naturally

averse to mysticism. He conceives of God in the Hebraic manner as the transcendent One, the Majesty in the heavens, who cannot be approached without awe and dread. It is this sense of the separateness of God which gives meaning to his doctrine of the great High Priest through whose mediation alone we can draw near. A mind of this type was out of sympathy with that longing to abide in God and partake of His nature which was characteristic of the time and found expression in its sacramental piety. The true mood of religion, as our writer knows it, is one not of mystical communion, but of reverence and godly fear.

Enough has been said to indicate the historical importance of the Epistle. It throws light on the circumstances of the church in a critical period, which would otherwise be almost completely dark. To a still greater extent it illustrates the movement of Christian thought, and helps us to understand how the later Catholic theology was evolved from the primitive teaching. But the value of the Epistle is not merely historical. It won its way into the New Testament by its sheer intrinsic worth, and has continued ever since to appeal to the permanent instincts of Christian devotion. To our own age, more perhaps than to any before, it conveys a direct message. Indeed it is one of the strangest facts about this strange Epistle that although outwardly the most archaic, it is in many ways the most modern of New Testament books. Under forms

now obsolete it embodies ideas and aspirations which we are wont to regard as peculiarly characteristic of our own time.

This may be partly accounted for by the circumstances of its origin. It was written to Christians of the second generation, born in the faith, and content to adhere to it as a matter of custom. The author was a man of culture and reflection, addressing himself to educated men. In the case of other New Testament books we are transported into a world that is foreign to us and is apt to appear unreal—a world of burning enthusiasms and mysterious hopes, of questions that could only present themselves when the gospel had broken in as a new revelation. But in this Epistle we can feel ourselves at home. We are in much the same position as its first readers—Christians of a later age, disillusioned by increase of knowledge, conventionally faithful to a religion whose inner meaning is too often hidden from us.

The Epistle commends itself to us the more readily because the mystical element is so entirely absent from it. Our age, it must be confessed, has little sympathy with the mystical side of religious feeling. Pauline and Johannine ideas have entered deeply into our traditional beliefs, and have moulded the language of devotion, but it may be doubted whether our response to them is wholly genuine. Not a few earnest men are alienated from Christianity because it is so intimately bound up with emotions which to their minds appear

forced and unmeaning. Now it would be foolish to think of mysticism as a passing phase of religion which we have outgrown. In one sense it is the typical and fundamental mood of religion, and signs are not wanting that the next age may witness its revival. But the present impatience with mysticism does not necessarily mean that we are growing less Christian. Our century has brought its own revelation—of the wonders and possibilities of the world we live in, of the tasks that lie before us as members of the human brotherhood. It is in the light of this revelation, and not of the mystical vision, that we seek to interpret the Christian message. And in the Epistle to the Hebrews this effort of our time has been, in a manner, anticipated. The gospel is here presented to us as a call not so much to inner communion with God as to a fuller realisation of His being and power. We are made to feel that this faith in God is the one secret of patience, endurance, valour, direction of the life that now is to higher issues. In this message of Hebrews there is indeed an element lacking, and we are not taken back to the ultimate springs of religion, as in the deeper utterances of Paul and John. But it is a noble and inspiring message, which, in these modern days of uncertainty, we can understand and believe.

For his lack of the subtler mystical feeling the writer of Hebrews makes up by his splendid idealism. He is assured, with his whole heart, that the spiritual realities are the ground of all else, that the things which

are seen were made out of things invisible.[1] Our task, therefore, in this world of change, is to reach beyond the types and shadows to that which is everlasting. By faith we attain to the true life. Is it not this same truth which has taken possession, in many different ways, of the mind of our own time? Moralists are never tired of complaining of the materialism of the age, but it may fairly be asserted that no age in history has less deserved the reproach. There has indeed been a wonderful material progress, but for this very reason men have been compelled to think more seriously about the goal. They are learning to realise, in a manner never possible before, that wealth and physical well-being and control of the natural forces cannot be ends in themselves, but have value only as they minister to those higher issues in which our true life consists. The generation that has fought the great war for the one purpose of saving its spiritual heritage cannot be accused of a blind materialism. For the sake of impalpable things—justice and freedom and humanity—it has spent all its gains, and has never wavered in the conviction that the end was worth the sacrifice. Doubtless there has been a decay of faith in the ecclesiastical sense, as the acceptance of given dogmas and traditions. But the faith that discerns a moral order in the world, and believes in things hoped for and unseen, is alive as it never was; and the religion of the future will be that which can embody and direct it.

[1] He 11^3.

It is this conception of faith which pervades the Epistle to the Hebrews and governs its whole interpretation of the gospel. Jesus appears in this Epistle as himself the supreme hero of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the Cross. There are thousands to whom mystical and doctrinal religion means little, and who are yet thrilled by the appeal of the 11th chapter of Hebrews. They would gladly enrol themselves in that army of faith which has waged the never-ending battle for the coming of God's Kingdom, and which looks to Christ as its great Captain.

But apart from its larger thesis the Epistle foreshadows the thought of our own time, in some of its most characteristic aspects. This might be shown in detail by reference to many particular passages, but it will be enough to indicate several of the more striking resemblances.

We may note, first, the protest of the Epistle against mere outward and official authority. On the surface, the argument that turns on the priesthood of Melchizedek is a typical example of the fantastic meanings which may be read into scripture by arbitrary exegesis. Nothing in the New Testament seems to be more remote from any living interest than those middle chapters of Hebrews. Yet it would not be too much to say that the idea which the writer is there trying to express is that which underlies all our modern thought—social and political as well as religious. He insists that there can

be no true authority which rests on a carnal commandment, on a law of hereditary succession or prescriptive right. Authority must reside in the man who wields it; the priesthood which can bring us nearer to God must be one of inherent character and personality. This is the principle that is struggling to come to its own in our democracies. It is asserting itself also in our churches, and gradually overthrowing the time-honoured theories of apostolic succession and the infallibility of popes and councils. We demand of the church that it should stand for a higher spiritual life; otherwise it has no right to our obedience. We bow to the authority of scripture only as it proves its inspiration by its intrinsic divine power. And in the Epistle itself we have a clear suggestion of a yet loftier application of the principle. The priesthood of Christ, we are ever and again reminded, is inseparable from what he was in his own Person. His claim upon us, the only claim that we can truly recognise, does not depend on any traditional creed, but on the impression he makes on us, as reflecting in his own life the character and will of God.

Again, the Epistle anticipates our own time in its attitude to the earlier stage of revelation. It was formerly assumed without question that since Christianity is the true religion all others must necessarily be false; and this view seemed to find support in the New Testament. Paul, for example, can account for the Law only on the hypothesis that God desired to increase sin in order that grace might much more abound.

But the writer of Hebrews, although he holds Christianity to be the true and final revelation, does not adopt this attitude. He believes that the gospel now proclaimed in all its fulness is only the "perfecting" of a divine message which has been coming to men from the beginning. Judaism, the highest of previous religions, was defective at every point, but it contained the promise and suggestion of something beyond itself. By type and allegory God had been leading men onward to a higher knowledge. He had revealed Himself to the fathers in many fragments before He spoke to us, in these last days, by His Son. Thus in the Epistle we find an anticipation of our modern effort to do justice to alien forms of faith. The writer knows nothing of the doctrine of development, which has offered us the solution of so many problems, but he has attained to something of the same result by his theory of symbolism. He is able to vindicate the surpassing worth of Christianity while acknowledging that elsewhere, in all earnest seeking after God, we can discover at least a reflection of the truth.

We pass, then, to another and more vital analogy. The question which the Epistle sets itself to answer is that which all thoughtful men are asking, in their different ways, to-day. How can we feel assured that Christianity is not merely one religion out of many, but the absolute religion? It is clear that without such an assurance we cannot hold fast our confession. Our will to believe will always be paralysed by the fear that

this revelation, like those before it, may be only for a time, and the truth may already have passed out of it. In not a little of our present-day thinking it is tacitly assumed that Christianity is nothing but a stage in the eternal quest for God—a stage which we are now preparing to leave behind us. Now the writer to the Hebrews is seeking to overcome an indifference which was due, in the last resort, to a similar frame of mind. He undertakes to prove that while other religions offered symbols of the truth, shadows of good things to come, it is now possible to grasp the realities. His proof is entangled, for it could not be otherwise, with modes of argument which have now grown obscure and unconvincing, but the underlying principles are sufficiently clear. They are still the principles that must guide us in every attempt to maintain the absolute worth of our religion.

For one thing, he insists on the significance of the historical Person of Christ. We have access to God through the great High Priest who was one with his brethren and who yet manifested in himself the divine nature. It does not much matter under what particular categories he thought of Christ, or whether we can now adjust our belief to those antique conceptions of the Messiah, the Logos, the Son. At the heart of the Christology of Hebrews lie the two great convictions that Christ was a man, who knew our human experiences and was tempted as we are, and that God came near to us through him. Such an High Priest became

us—one who shared in the life of men and could yet bring them into the presence of God. The endeavour has often been made, and in our day it has taken many directions, to ensure an absolute value to Christianity by lifting it out of history and resolving it into a colourless system of idealism or ethics; but when this is done it is emptied of precisely those elements which are the secret of its enduring power. Abstract systems are impotent at the best, and are soon outworn. The Christian message is inexhaustible because it is one with an actual Personality—the same yesterday and to-day and for ever.

Further, the Epistle asserts the absolute worth of the new revelation because of its inwardness, its identification of the true service of God with a condition of will and heart. The old covenant had no power to impart anything but a ceremonial purity. The new covenant seeks to purify the conscience from dead works; and it is by this renewal of the life, in its whole spirit and motive, that we draw near to the living God. Those doubts of the permanence of Christianity which arise from time to time are almost all based on a false conception of it as a system of ordinances and doctrines, not essentially different from earlier modes of worship "which stood only in meats and drinks and divers washings."[1] We rightly feel that such things are formal and accessory, and that a religion bound to them can have no lasting validity. But Christianity, as we

[1] He 9^{10}.

know it from our Epistle, and from the teaching of Jesus himself, consists in an inward consecration, a submission of our will to the divine will. It is impossible that this conception of worship should ever be transcended. Religious progress in the future can only take the form of a growing realisation of the truth imparted to us, once for all, in the gospel.

Once more, the writer to the Hebrews thinks of Christianity as containing in itself the impulse to this progress. It seeks by its very nature to grasp the realities which lie beyond all symbolic forms. Christ is the "perfecter of faith," who inspires in his people a desire that cannot be satisfied till it has attained to the very image of the things. A conception like this, when we understand it in terms of modern thought, involves the demand for a growing apprehension of what is central and permanent in the gospel. Too often in the past the church has insisted on the fixity of its dogmas and institutions. It has assumed that the revelation entrusted to it could have no claim to finality if any door were left open to the idea of change and progress. But we are beginning now to realise that just the opposite is true. Christianity, as our Epistle would teach us, is rooted in the desire to draw near to God; and the advance towards an ever clearer and more certain vision is inseparable from its very essence.

The Epistle to the Hebrews stands by itself in the New Testament, and in many respects must always

remain a riddle. Even in its own day it was a difficult book. The author addressed himself not to the church at large, but to a limited circle of disciples, and was well aware that he had much to say to them that they would find hard to understand. For us the difficulties have increased a hundredfold. Ever and again we come on some great utterance which can never lose its freshness, but the argument as a whole appears to move in a strange and distant world of thought. We study it with a mere historical interest, as illustrating a phase of Christian reflection which we have outgrown. As an historical document the Epistle is indeed of priceless value. Without it we should be unable to bridge the momentous interval that stretches between the primitive age and the emergence of the church as a world-wide power. But it is also one of the classic books of our religion. The more we penetrate its meaning, the more we discover that this unknown writer is dealing with the vital issues of the Christian message. Under the forms and the language of a bygone age he is facing the same problems that perplex us to-day. And in our struggle with those problems, some of which may seem to spring directly out of the changed conditions of our modern world, we can still go back to that teacher of the early church, and find guidance and strength.

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